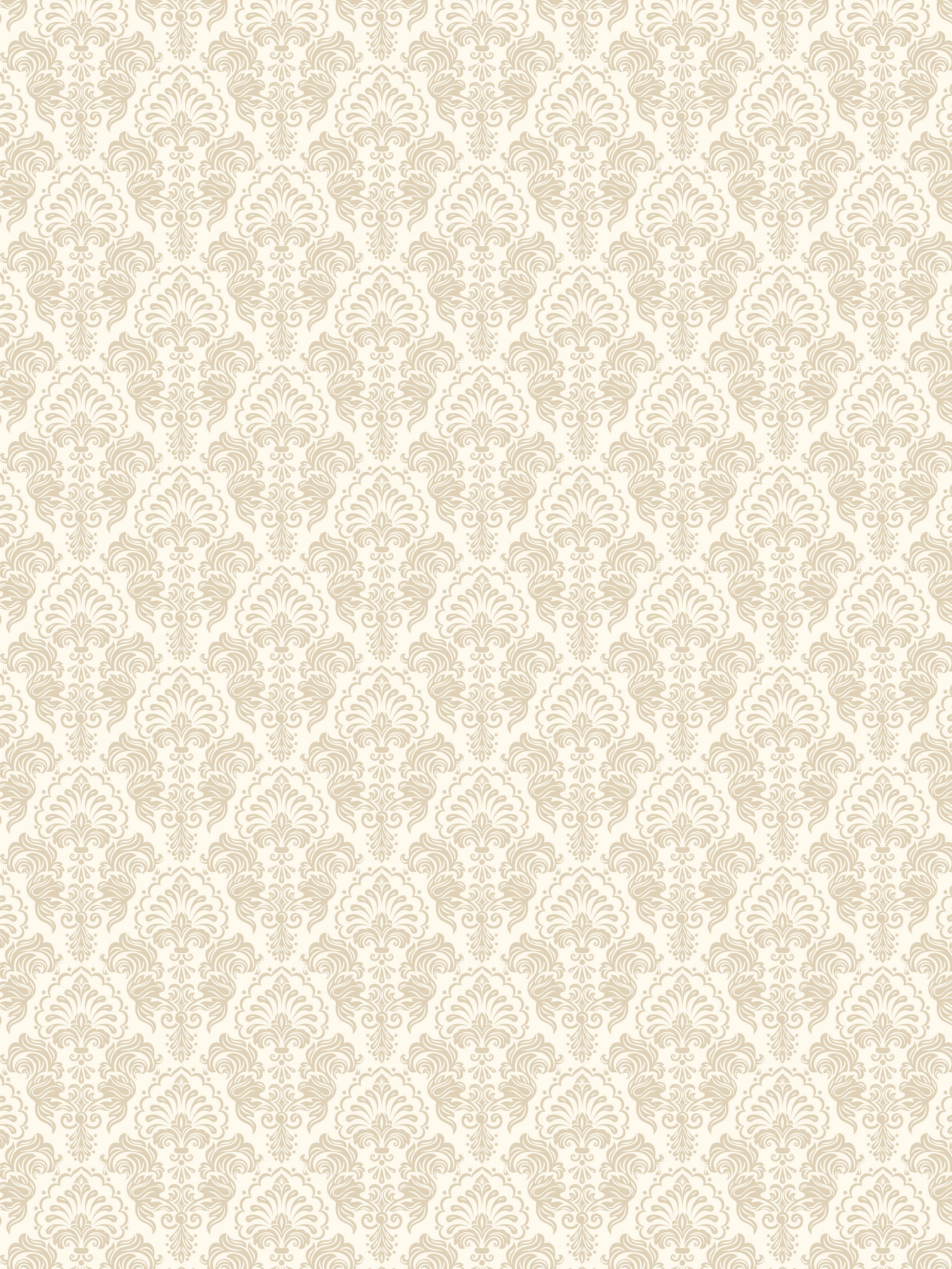


YEARS OF OUR INTIMACY



A Sherlock Holmes & Yuujin
Mikotoba Anthology

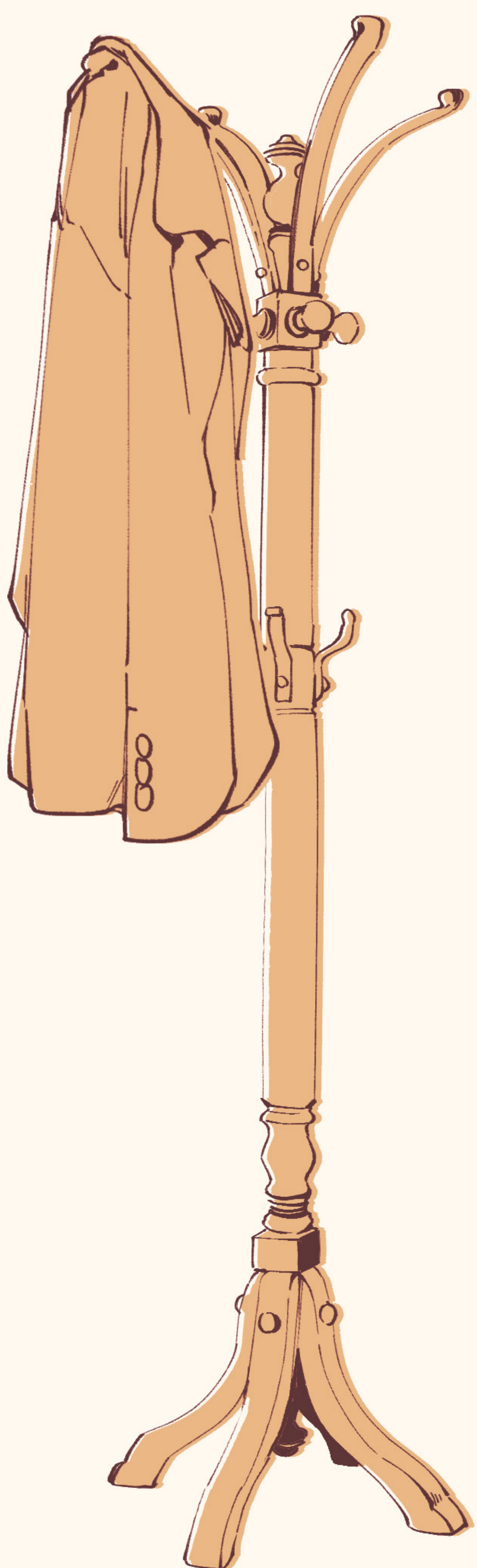


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AND,

HOW WAS YOUR
FIRST DAY IN
LONDON, MR.
MIKOTOBA?

AH, WELL... I'M
STILL TRYING
TO ACCLIMATE.

EVERYTHING IS
SO NEW TO ME,
AND THERE IS SO
MUCH TO DO.
IT'S ALL RATHER
EXHAUSTING.

THERE'S ALSO
THE MATTER
OF FINDING A
PERMANENT
PLACE TO
STAY...

AH, NOW THAT YOU
MENTION IT, I
RECALL ONE OF
OUR TECHNICIANS
HAS BEEN LOOKING
FOR A FLATMATE.

IT SEEMS THAT
HE FOUND QUITE
AN AFFORDABLE
SUITE WITHIN
WALKING DISTANCE
OF THE HOSPITAL.

AN AFFORD-
ABLE SUITE,
AND SO
CLOSE TO THE HOSPI-
TAL?

HOW COME
HE HASN'T
FOUND
ANYONE
YET?



ABOUT THAT,
WELL...

I THINK IT
WOULD BE
BEST IF YOU
MET HIM IN
PERSON.

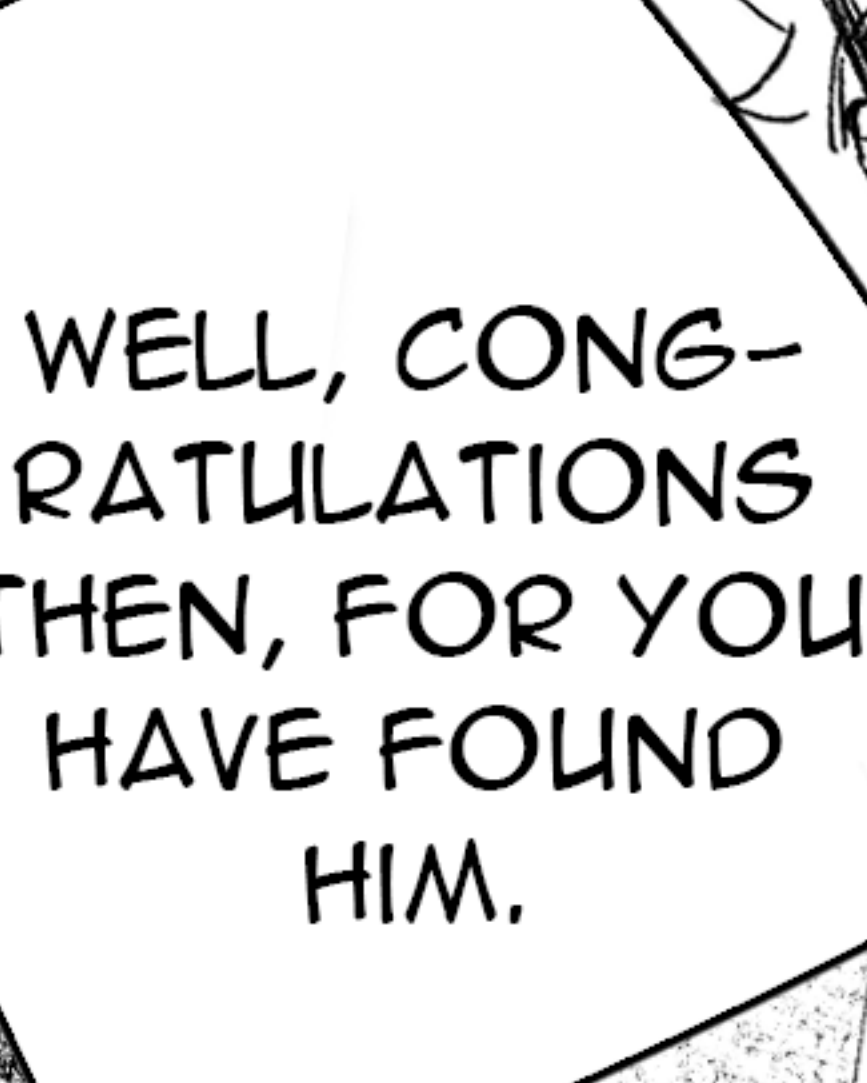
I WONDER
WHAT HE
MEANT BY
THAT...

AH YES! I
SHOULD FIND
THIS MR.
HOLMES
QUICK!

DR. WATSON
SAID HE USU-
ALLY SPENDS
HIS EVENINGS IN
THE CHEMISTRY
LAB.



EXCUSE ME,
I'M LOOKING
FOR MR.
HOLMES?



WELL, CONGRATULATIONS THEN, FOR YOU HAVE FOUND HIM.



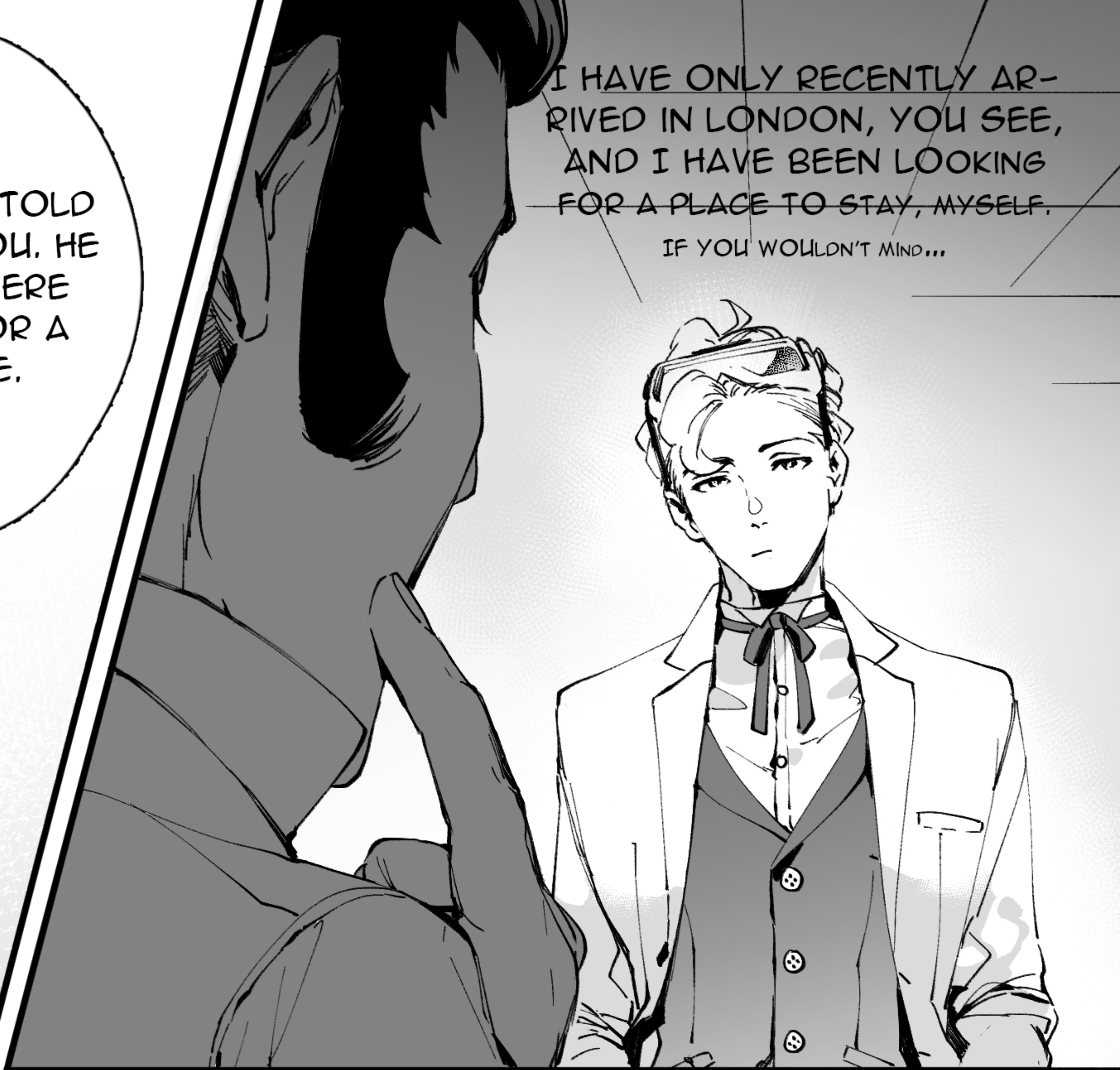
AND MADE A
MESS OF HIS
LATEST SCIEN-
TIFIC ACHIEVE-
MENT, TO
BOOT!

O-OH! I'M
SO VERY
SORRY, MR.
HOLMES.

I-IT'S JUST...
THERE WAS
SOMETHING I
NEEDED TO
TALK TO YOU
ABOUT.



DR. WATSON TOLD ME ABOUT YOU. HE SAID YOU WERE LOOKING FOR A FLATMATE.



I HAVE ONLY RECENTLY ARRIVED IN LONDON, YOU SEE, AND I HAVE BEEN LOOKING FOR A PLACE TO STAY, MYSELF. IF YOU WOULDN'T MIND...



An exchange student.

A wife... No, he recently divorced.

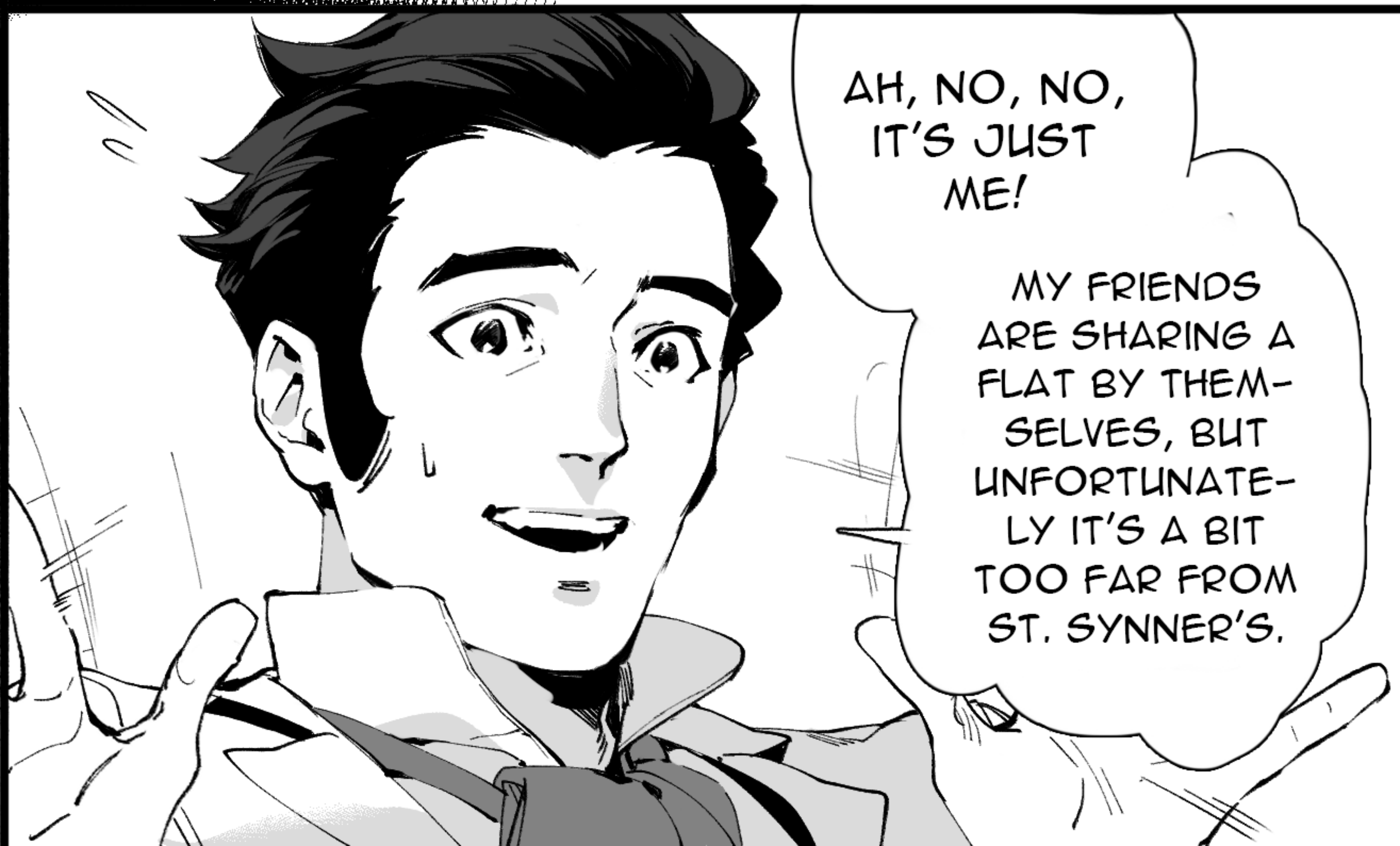
No, not just that. His wife only just passed.

He doesn't smoke, but he does drink occasionally.



YOU...
DON'T HAVE ANY ANIMALS OR CHILDREN WITH YOU EITHER, I TAKE IT?

"EITHER" ...?



AH, NO, NO, IT'S JUST ME!

MY FRIENDS ARE SHARING A FLAT BY THEMSELVES, BUT UNFORTUNATELY IT'S A BIT TOO FAR FROM ST. SYNNER'S.

WELL, IN
THAT
CASE,

FEEL FREE TO DROP
BY THIS ADDRESS
TOMORROW AF-
TERNOON AND
WE'LL SETTLE
THINGS.

YOU HAVE
CLASS UNTIL 3
P.M., YES?

221B Baker Street
London NW1 6XE
AUDON'S SUITE
SOLUTIONS

...
PARDON
ME?

I-IT'S
NOTHING!

I WAS
JUST ...
THINKING
OUT LOUD!

BRILLIANT...

PAH!
NOW, IF
YOU WOULD
BE SO KIND
TO LEAVE,

I WAS RIGHT IN
THE MIDDLE OF
THIS CENTURY'S
GREATEST SCIENTIFIC
BREAK-
THROUGH!

AH, SO
THIS IS
WHAT DR.
WATSON
MEANT...

WELL, THEN,
THANK YOU
FOR YOUR
TIME, MR.
HOLMES.

I SHALL
TAKE MY
LEAVE
NOW.

click —



"BRILLIANT"....?







Fortune's Favourite

by Delaney



The current snowstorm is kinder to London than Sherlock expected it to be. Based on the pattern of the clouds, he thought that they'd get something just short of a blizzard. Tonight, the flakes prove him wrong. They're gentle and wispy, more like a ghost's kiss than anything tangible. Sherlock takes the poorly-lit side roads back to Baker Street, humming absently as he runs over the bills in his pocket again and again.

His hand twinges with pain each time he counts, but it's nothing notable. His dislocated fingers can be fixed once he gets inside and is sure Mikotoba won't notice them. The temporary pain is small, really, nothing against the joy of the fact that he just won two months worth of rent in a boxing match. Two months! Sure, the fellows running the night's festivities were less than pleased to discover that he won a bulk of the money by betting on himself, but it's not like they can ban him from the gym for that! If they didn't want boxers to bet on themselves, they would have made a formal rule against it. It was their loss, and his gain.

(He was still told not to return. Sore losers, the whole lot of them.)

It wasn't merely his portion of the rent, either. No, Sherlock had enough in his pocket to pay for himself and for Mikotoba through the end of March. If

December hadn't already passed them by, he would be tempted to call it a Christmas miracle. Not that miracles really exist, of course, but the expression is nice. *A Christmas miracle*. It'll please Mikotoba, too. Perhaps he'll even smile.

Mikotoba's been doing that more often. Smiling, that is. When they met back in July, he seemed incapable of it. Now, Sherlock's blessed with at least one smile a day, if not two. He would put that smile on a microscope slide and study it if he could, but that would require more surgery than he knows how to perform. There's only so much he can pick up just from listening to Mikotoba, and he wouldn't want his first practical attempts at the art to be on his... roommate.

Yes. Roommate. That was the word Sherlock was going to go with.

(A more intimate word – *partner* – comes to mind. He doesn't even have the nerve to think about it for very long. Still, it echoes.)

Sherlock unlocks the door to 221B with his good hand, keeping the injured one firmly in his pocket. His nose had stopped bleeding once he got outside, and he's fairly sure there's no more blood on his face.

"Mikotoba! I have fantastic news!" he announces

when he enters, shaking the snow out of his hair.

Mikotoba is sitting at his desk in the living room, hunched over a book whose title Sherlock can't catch from his angle. His jacket has been discarded, and his sleeves are rolled up to the elbow. Has he ever seen Mikotoba's forearms before now? He can't recall, but they are inordinately handsome forearms, as strong and sturdy as the rest of the man. How does one even *have* handsome forearms? He can't quite say, only that Mikotoba certainly does.

"Did you finally get Stevens to give you a discount on those beakers you were talking about?"

"My dear man, I got something *better*."

That gets Mikotoba to look away from his book, but he... isn't smiling. In fact, his face wrinkles up into something like an alarm.

"Holmes, your nose!"

"My... Oh! Has it started bleeding again?"

Curiously, he raises a hand to his face and yes, that blood is warmer and fresher than it was a few moments ago. He should've figured this would happen. The cold may have stopped the bleeding, but it's not surprising that the warmth of their flat would undo that work.

"It was bleeding before this?"

"Well, I did get punched in the face," Sherlock explains.

Mikotoba turns several shades of red, somewhere between flustered and furious. "And how did you manage to do that?!"

Sherlock shrugs. "The typical way people get punched in the face! The fellow reared his fist back and –"

"That's not what I meant," he interrupts. He's full-

on scowling now, two neat little lines forming between his eyebrows. Sherlock only gets to see both lines in such clarity when Sherlock's made him well and truly cross. Normally, any reaction he gets from Mikotoba is something that he treasures. Tonight, he feels less victorious – Sherlock had wanted to see him happy.

"Oh, don't make that face, Mikotoba! I get worse injuries during cases all the time!"

Mikotoba turns away from him, glancing towards the window. "I'd rather you not get yourself hurt at all."

One of the things that he appreciates about Mikotoba is that he almost always holds his gaze. Now, he's not; he only looks away like that when he's upset, and he's only seen Mikotoba do that a handful of times. And if Sherlock comes home with a mild injury, nothing that would cause any financial pain or bed rest, and he was in fine spirits before his arrival, then he's upset because... he cares that he's hurt. Mikotoba... cares about him. As a person, that is, not as a flatmate or mystery-solving machine. He genuinely cares about Sherlock Holmes.

(There's an ache in his chest, something as raw and exposed as a body on the autopsy table. There's no immediate cause for it except for something too tender and uncertain to name, not when Mikotoba's wife hasn't even been dead for a full year. It's something that Sherlock will have to keep to himself.)

Lost in his thoughts as he is, Sherlock doesn't notice that they're in the kitchen until Mikotoba's pointing at the table, fully prepared to take a look at his injuries. He probably wants Sherlock to sit in the chair, but habit takes over and he sits on the table itself.

"Lean your head forward," Mikotoba instructs,

and Sherlock obeys the order, his injured hand still squarely in his pocket. He can't bother Mikotoba with that, too, not when he's already pinching the bridge of his nose to stop the blood flow. Sherlock can't concern him any more than he already has.

The touch is objectively not romantic. He's not receiving a gentle caress—Mikotoba is using a great deal of force, the sort that's necessary for stopping nosebleeds. Still, beyond his thumb and forefinger, the other three fingers are resting on his face. Mikotoba's ring finger is resting directly on his lower lip. That's close enough to haunt him; he won't be able to think about anything else for weeks.

"To answer your earlier question, I entered a boxing match," Sherlock says. His voice sounds higher-pitched with his nose shut off, almost childish. Smiling is an awkward affair with them positioned as they are, but he can't help it. "On a related note, no need to worry about rent this month! Or next."

The pressure on his nose falters for a second, but it returns with startling speed. "You're kidding."

"I'm perfectly serious! I went to the gym and bet on myself. Half of gambling is simple statistics, so it wasn't hard to calculate how much I needed to put down to turn a profit."

"And they allow you to do that?"

Sherlock scoffs. It's hard to scoff when his nose is being held captive. "Not anymore. They made it very clear that I was not welcome back."

"There will be other gyms," Mikotoba tells him. "And more cases, I suspect. I saw Inspector Gregson this afternoon, and he seemed quite stumped. Apparently there's been a string of disappearances on Fleet Street."

"A string of them?" Like a bloodhound on the trail, Sherlock chases Mikotoba for details. "Did he men-

tion how many? Is he looking at three, or a dozen? Perhaps a baker's dozen? And did they disappear *from* Fleet Street, or did they live on Fleet Street before disappearing? Has he started a geographic profile? Has Asougi? I'll be starting my own, of course, but it's important to know where the Yard is on these things. What about witnesses, how many has Gregson interviewed so far? Did he give you a number?"

There's a brief twitch in Mikotoba's face. It settles into a smile. "You can ask him all of that yourself. I invited him over for tea on Saturday."

"Mikotoba, have I ever told you that you're the best flatmate in London?"

Without any sort of ceremony, his nose is freed from Mikotoba's grip. However, he doesn't stop touching Sherlock. No, now his hands are wandering, pressing down on the space under Sherlock's eyes.

"It doesn't feel like you've broken anything in your face," he says. "And I think you said that at the market last week, when I found that coffee table that was on sale."

"It was a good sale."

Mikotoba hums and takes out a handkerchief from his pocket. He swipes away the remaining blood from Sherlock's face without comment. Sherlock wishes he had a comment, something clever to say about the Fleet Street case or his success in the boxing ring. As it is, all he can think of is Mikotoba's fingers, the little callouses from where he holds his scalpel and the weight of his ring finger on his lips. Even though the cotton of the handkerchief, Sherlock can feel them.

And then, it's over. Sherlock's nose is fine. His face is free of blood. His hand is something he can deal with later, once Mikotoba falls asleep. Mikotoba works the morning shift tomorrow. It's still star-

tling to know someone else's shifts when it's not for a case, but he knows them. Mikotoba works the morning shift on Tuesdays, Thursdays, and every other Saturday. He takes his tea without sugar or cream. He likes his toast ever so slightly burnt.

"Did they give you the money?" Mikotoba asks. "The fellows from the gym, I mean."

"Of course! Really, I was lucky that they had that much money to give out, but they did. That's the other part of gambling, you know. Luck."

"That's odd," he mutters.

"Odd how?"

Sherlock is still sitting on the kitchen table. He suddenly would like to be on the floor, but Mikotoba is standing in front of him, preventing that from happening.

"You like proving your point," he says. "You've shown me all kinds of evidence, even when I wasn't on the case. In any other circumstance, I'd expect you to have put the cash on my desk while telling me the tale. You still have your coat on, too. It's not your habit. Normally, the first thing you do when you walk in is take it off. I thought it was just because you were still cold, but..."

Ah. Right. Mikotoba is brilliant – it's part of why Sherlock likes him so much. Perhaps it was foolish, to think that he would be able to hide it in the first place. He always seems to be quite foolish when it comes to Mikotoba.

"Once again, your observational skills are top-notch," he admits. "But you haven't come to a conclusion."

"If you haven't shown me the money, but you have it, and you're still wearing your coat..."

Sherlock sees the second that it hits him. He blinks

several times in a row, almost like he can't believe that he's figured something out. Sherlock believes it, of course. He doesn't consider himself to be especially trusting, but he's never been able to find it in himself to doubt Mikotoba. As soon as he said that he noticed something odd, Sherlock knew he'd find the cause of it. He was just hoping that Mikotoba wouldn't notice anything odd in the first place.

"What did you do to your hand?" he asks.

Sheepishly, Sherlock takes the hand out of his pocket. The dislocation looks worse than he remembers, and the skin around it is warm and red. Even worse, he feels that same sensation on his face—Mikotoba's made him blush.

"I didn't want to worry you with it," he admits. Saying it out loud makes him feel vaguely seasick.

"A bit too late for that, don't you think?"

"Well, it's only the two fingers! Nothing too serious!"

Sherlock tries to wiggle his pointer and middle to prove his point, but the pain makes him grimace.

"As long as you don't try to move them like that. Let me see, I think I should have something in here..."

Mikotoba rifles through the cabinets and comes out with a needle. A very large needle.

"It's just a local anesthetic. Hold still."

Sherlock knows the price of anesthetics. He doesn't know the price of everything in London, of course, but he knows the price of everything important. "That's a bit expensive for me, don't you think?"

Mikotoba is an expert with the needle. He angles it just right, so that it feels like a bee sting rather than a proper medical needle. "It's worth the price."

Logically, it isn't. It's two dislocated fingers, and

Mikotoba pops them back into place with ease. He could've done it with Sherlock in pain. But following his earlier logic about Mikotoba caring about him as a person, it fits. Of course he wants to spare him pain. Of course.

"Did you wrap your hands before your match?" He asks, winding bandages around his fingers.

"Not well. I was in a bit of a rush."

"If you want, I can wrap them for you next time."

Sherlock grimaces. "Well, I usually wrap them just before I fight. Are you sure you'd want to come?"

His hand is thoroughly bandaged now, free from any further risk. Mikotoba doesn't let go of it.

"Yes," he says. It's so faint that Sherlock has to strain to hear it, but it's unmistakable. Yes.

Sherlock can't help it—he grabs both of Mikotoba's hands like a man possessed, the warmth impossible to resist. The thing he refuses to name blooms

in his chest, an irrepressible spring in the midst of January.

"I'm glad," Sherlock tells him. "I... I find myself much happier when you're with me."

It seems impossible that there's a world beyond this moment, this kitchen, the curve of Mikotoba's lips as he smiles.

"As do I," he says.

It's not what he thought he'd get. Sherlock expected a smile because of the money, the good luck, perhaps the comedy of winning so much that he got banned from a gym. But to get this smile, this moment, this man making himself at home in the empty spaces of Sherlock's world – it's better than luck, or statistics, or miracles. It's his life, and Sherlock's never been happier with it.





The Sulking Detective

by Nic



Mikotoba suppressed a sigh as Holmes once again turned away from him.

The pair had been going at this for *two days* now. Mikotoba would come to his room and offer food, and Holmes would turn his back to him, never leaving his mattress. The sheets were now so twisted about the detective's ankles that they looked like a tornado – perhaps the same one that must have run through his hair to make it so dishevelled. Despite him looking to be caught by the feet in a whirlpool, though, Mikotoba knew he was getting up at least occasionally, if only due to the fact that any time the doctor opened the curtains in the room, they were closed again by his next visit.

“You must eat, else you wither away,” he urged as he left a bowl filled with soup upon the small amount of space on the bedside table. Really, the man needed far more than food, but it was an important first step to recovering from all this.

But said step was not taken, or even started. Holmes remained perfectly still, not even a single wiggle of a toe nor the twitch of his ears as they so often did with interest in the world around him. Mikotoba could even think him to be a statue, so grey and lifeless and entirely unlike the roommate he had been growing to know.

“...My stomach has no more desire to eat than I, doctor,” the detective replied, voice as stuffy and constricting as the room.

Mikotoba's brow furrowed, but he did make his best attempt to sympathise. “...Well, you haven't moved a muscle in so long, I can imagine you're not all that hungry. I am sure, however, that once you have taken a bite, you will find that you are hungrier than you might think. Come, Holmes.”

It was Holmes' turn to sigh, the frame of his shoulders expanding just slightly but the sound entirely unrestrained. The frustration was so clear in the huff of breath and the tension of his body. Like a child throwing a tantrum, Mikotoba thought, wordlessly moving to sit at the very edge of the bed. He reached over to feel the temperature of the man's head. He already knew there would be no fever found there, but it was still vexing that Holmes finally was motivated to action only to swat the hand away and turn further to press his face entirely into his pillow.

The man was not sick, at least not in any way Mikotoba had learned in all of his medical studies. He was simply... well, to put it as clinically as possible, the doctor surmised the man was simply pouting. Why this had become the burden of Mikotoba himself, who was beginning to feel something more of

a nanny than a roommate, he did not know.

He did know, to an extent, the cause of all of the upset. Two days prior, a case that the consulting detective had been pursuing had reached an abrupt end. There had been two clients: a brother and sister pair who had been suffering threats from their uncle, whom Holmes had been all too excited to go and investigate, Mikotoba pulled along in the current of his anticipation. Even as they had found a damning letter in the distant estate, the brother back in London had pulled his gun on his sister, having been in league with the uncle all along. Scotland Yard had handled the rest, smugly pushing Holmes out of his position in the case and into the downward spiral Mikotoba was now trying to break.

At the very least, Scotland Yard's actions were his best guess at the cause for this despair. He was not the detective here, the one who could pick up on the slightest glance or word choice. He could only say that, at the moment, nothing was physically wrong. The doctor quietly folded his hands against his own gut, resolving himself to get this over with *today*, before the man hurt himself over whatever pride had been apparently offended by the success of the police.

"Holmes..." he prodded again. "*I am* a doctor. I know you're angry, but please allow me to –"

"What do you know, Doctor?" The younger man pulled his arm over his face, muffling his words until they were just barely audible. Almost as though he were trying to gnaw the whole limb off with each word he spoke. "One would think that you very well would know, but I suppose you occupy a much easier space than I. *You* have a job, my dear fellow: a direction, an oath to recite and no need to answer to anyone personally – and what is a consulting detective?"

Mikotoba's face solidified into a frown. Sure, he should be pleased that the man was finally speaking in more than disgruntled murmurs, as things had been. It would be healthier for him to get whatever feelings off his chest in word, after all. Yet something about the indignance in his voice burned an annoyance in Mikotoba's own chest, searing from his heart through his veins 'til his head felt hot.

So being allowed to lounge about until you overcome a tantrum is easier than spending hour after hour, toiling in the hospital and running about to care for my patients, only to now return home to take care of another?

"Holmes, you don't truly believe that, do you?" he asked bitterly. He was only just able to wrangle the true extent of his irritation out of his words. He couldn't allow himself to fall to those same childish depths, even if the urge was rising. "You're the one meant to be the genius here, so surely you understand. You may have your rivals to contend with, but... everyone is fighting something, often more tangible and costly than your *pride*."

Suddenly, sheets and pillows were thrown into the air in a flurry of movement, tossed carelessly to the ground as Holmes rounded the bed and snatched the doctor's shoulders in his hands. Standing over Mikotoba that way, the detective truly seemed to tower above him...and yet, with those gaunt eyes, the withdrawn frame, and the slight weakness in those slender fingers from days without movement nor energy, Holmes seemed much smaller than his spirit had ever been.

"What do you do, then?" he asked, his words quick and sharp as a blade. "When death threatens to snatch your patients from the world? When all that you worked for was for naught, and the blood is still drying upon your hands?"

"That's –" Mikotoba stammered, recoiling. "That's

cold, Holmes. You know that it does happen, do you not? That life has slipped through my fingers, for not doing enough in time, for being incapable of being perfect”

– he slowed for a moment. As he had spoken, Holmes’ face hadn’t so much as twitched, but his fingertips had trembled before digging deeper into his collarbones at the word *perfect*. He slowed only for that moment, and then he grimaced as the rest of his sentiment threatened to burst out of his chest –

“and letting not only my patients down, but all of their loved ones as well? I may work for a hospital, but it is still my own failings that cause whatever happens. You ask me what I do, Holmes, and the answer is that I sit in regret.”

Mikotoba fell silent, breathing, having been worked up *far* too much by that taunting question. But how else could he respond? When Holmes was acting like none of that mattered, like life was a fickle thing to be tossed around for the sake of pride and competition over it.

...Or was it?

Had the guilt of lives lost not looked on his face like Holmes did now? Grey, as if dripping with dust, movement hindered by cobwebs that were, in reality, just threads tied by one’s own heart. The sickened look in those intense eyes when Holmes had learned the truth miles away from where the attempted murder had occurred – perhaps that had been the look of having lost a life rather than a look of arrogance challenged.

Mikotoba relaxed his shoulders within Holmes’ grip just before the man wordlessly released him and flopped face-down onto the mattress beside him. “Oh, Holmes...” he sighed, but now his voice was tinged in fondness and regret. “It wasn’t the

Yard you were furious at at all, was it?”

The man once again had his face concealed, but it didn’t take a facial tell to understand the groan he let out. Mikotoba drew his leg up onto the bed to turn to him, placing a firm hand on his back. “You were just worried for the girl, weren’t you?” he suggested, tone falling back into gentleness. “You regret putting her in danger. But... you know that she lives, do you not? She is perfectly safe, even if you were not the one to save her.”

“I cannot risk trusting them with *lives*, Doctor,” he mumbled. “My client put her life in my hands and I failed her. ’Twas only by sheer luck that she breathes today, but it hangs on my conscience the same as though she perished. I do not deserve their trust until I can be certain that my deductions will be perfect from start to finish. Otherwise, there is hardly a point to my work.”

“What are you saying!” Mikotoba cried, shocked. “But you are still the main reason the case was solved! What, would you say that first aid is useless when you don’t know every –”

“I do not wish to hear it, Doctor.”

Mikotoba fought the rising protest, but bit it back. No, no, now wasn’t the time to argue his roommate’s feelings, who still did not act out of a sound mind. He was a better man... no, a better *friend*, than that. He needed to sit back – he couldn’t prescribe a solution to this kind of sickness, but he could be a relief. “Alright,” he said simply. He settled himself more comfortably beside him, letting his hand slide up to give his friend’s hair a good-natured ruffle.

“...You may leave me be,” came the hesitant voice.

Mikotoba’s hand froze, then slipped away, but his breath remained paused. When this had been him, when he had withered away doing nothing for days,

well – the respite had come from a friend, from adventuring out here, had it not?

“Do you wish me to?”

“...Hum.” The man shook his head into the bed. “No, I suppose not. Pray, listen for a moment, for I have been going back through the case step-by-step in my mind. I believe the beginning of my mistakes was with our first meeting with the brother, when I ignored...”

The great detective went on for quite some time, agonising over every single detail of the case that clung to his mind until he solved how he could have been perfect. As he spoke and spoke, life’s light began to flicker and ignite within him again, and Mikotoba was able to quietly take his arm. Guide him upright again, bring the bowl of soup into his hands. In no time at all, his upset words were replaced by the clink of his spoon against the bottom of the bowl until the spark returned to the man’s eyes. Without even needing any further encouragement, Holmes rose to his feet and stepped out of his room for the first time in so long, talking lightly to himself about wanting to follow up on something peculiar he had noticed in the paper a week prior.

Mikotoba chuckled quietly to himself, having been left with the emptied bowl and whatever kind of mess of the bedroom remained. What a man he had been saddled with, still young and filled with drama from head to toe. Perhaps they would part ways in life soon enough, but he did not suppose that the current arrangements – nor the man himself – were all that bad. He shook his head to himself before heading out the door to follow –

Only to bump straight into Holmes, who apparently had not made it far out of his room and instead had turned so they now stood close, with breast against breast.

“By the way, my dear Mikotoba,” he said, ever so naturally and content, as he grabbed the sides of his companion’s arms, “I must thank you. You truly are an invaluable partner, whom I could never even think to return to work without. You shall have to be prepared to rise before dawn settles in tomorrow, for I smell a case approaching that I would not set upon without you by my side.”

Mikotoba was still struggling to catch his breath for the way the man leaned over him close, for the bestowment of the title *partner*, for all the confusion following the way he could have sworn this very man had just been speaking of an exceptionally early retirement. He himself was still quite young, but Holmes seemed to have double the amount of youthful energy of most his own age. He was certainly breathtaking, in far more ways than one.

...Perhaps he wouldn’t mind remaining in their current living arrangement for as long as he could.

“Of course, Holmes,” he finally agreed with a smile that was immediately reflected back to him even brighter. “I would not miss seeing you in action again for the world.”



THAT'S
ENOUGH.



WH—

POFF!

I'M TURNING IN
FOR THE NIGHT.



AREN'T *YOU* THE
ONE WHO WAS TRY-
ING TO SEDUCE ME
LAST NIGHT?

No

TRUE AS THAT MAY
BE, I'VE CHANGED MY
MIND NOW.

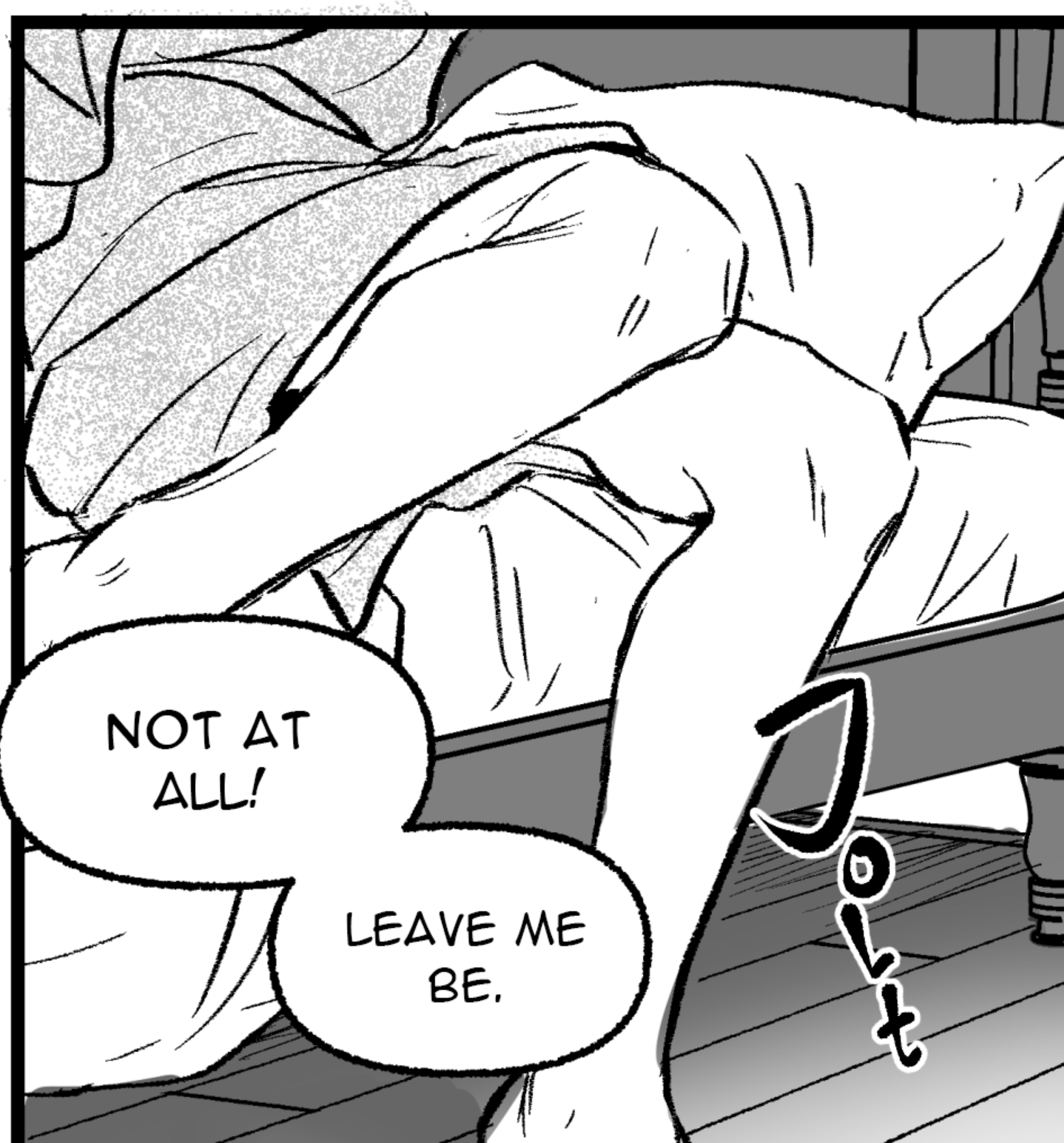
HOLMES...



Swish

Swish

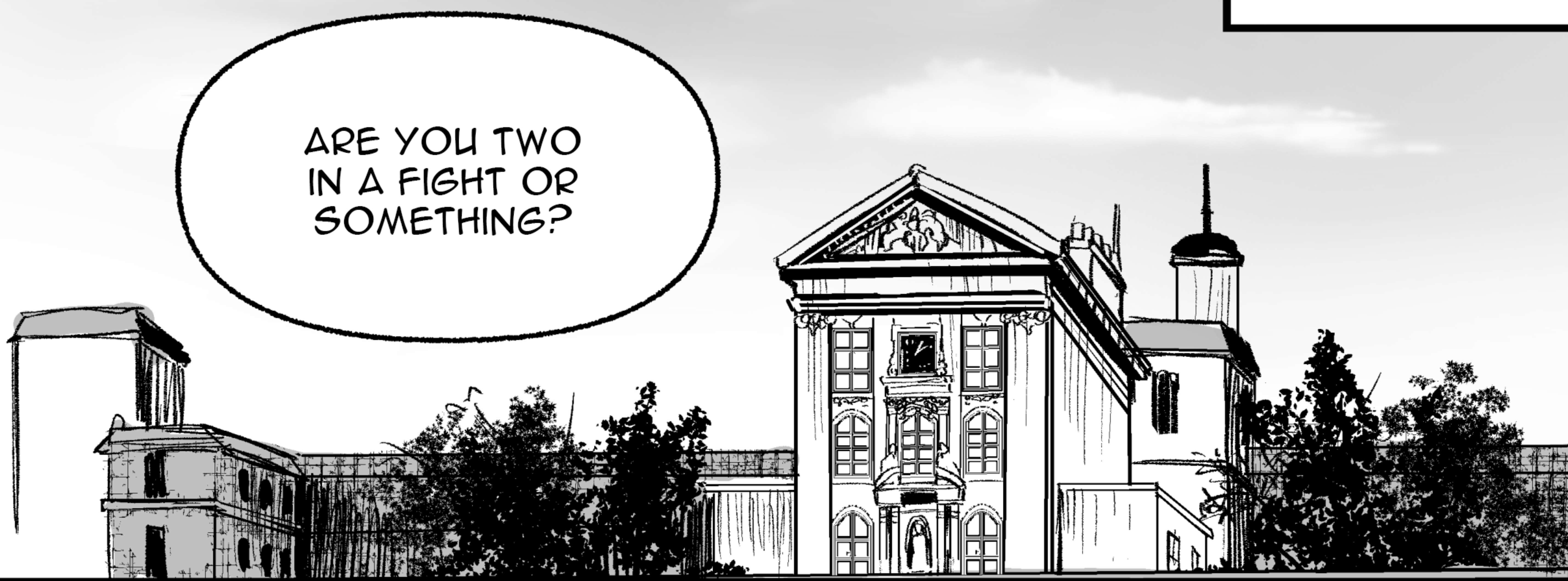
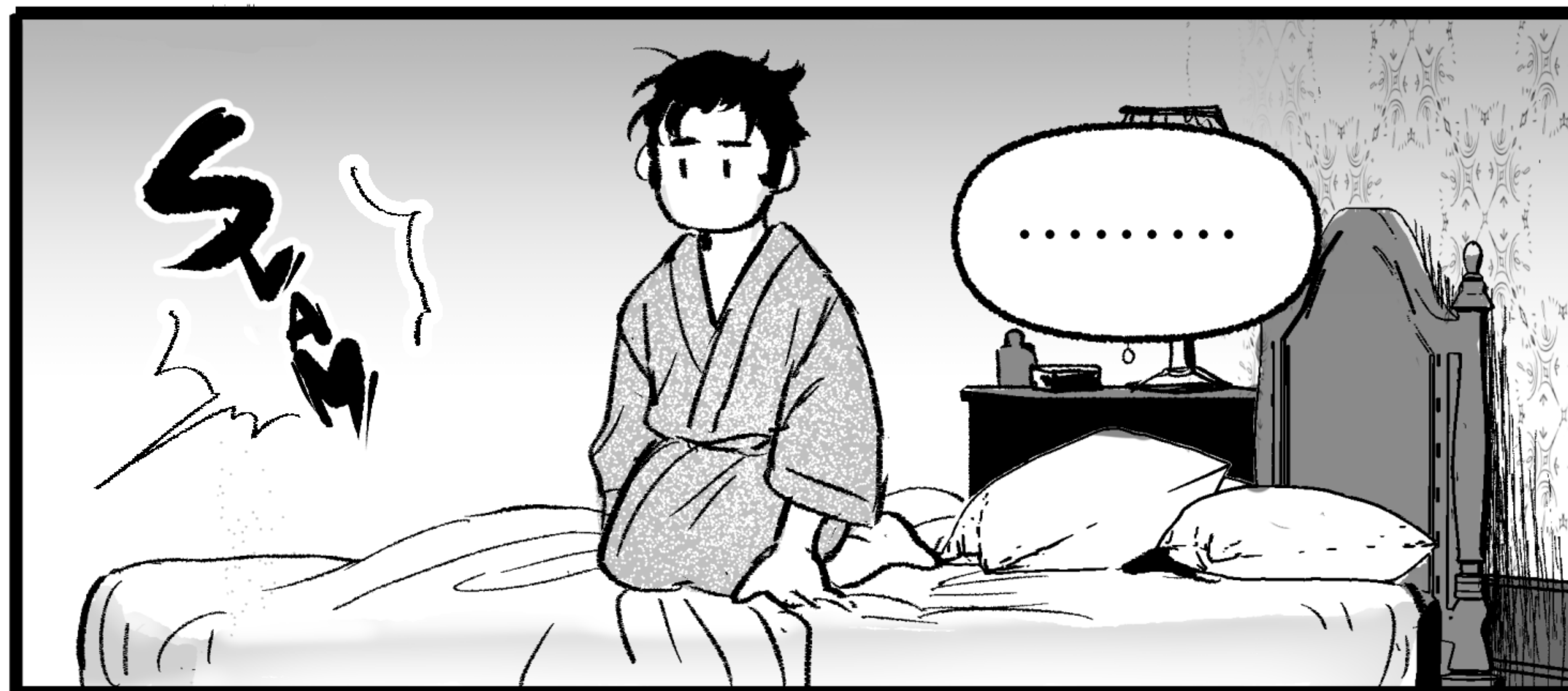
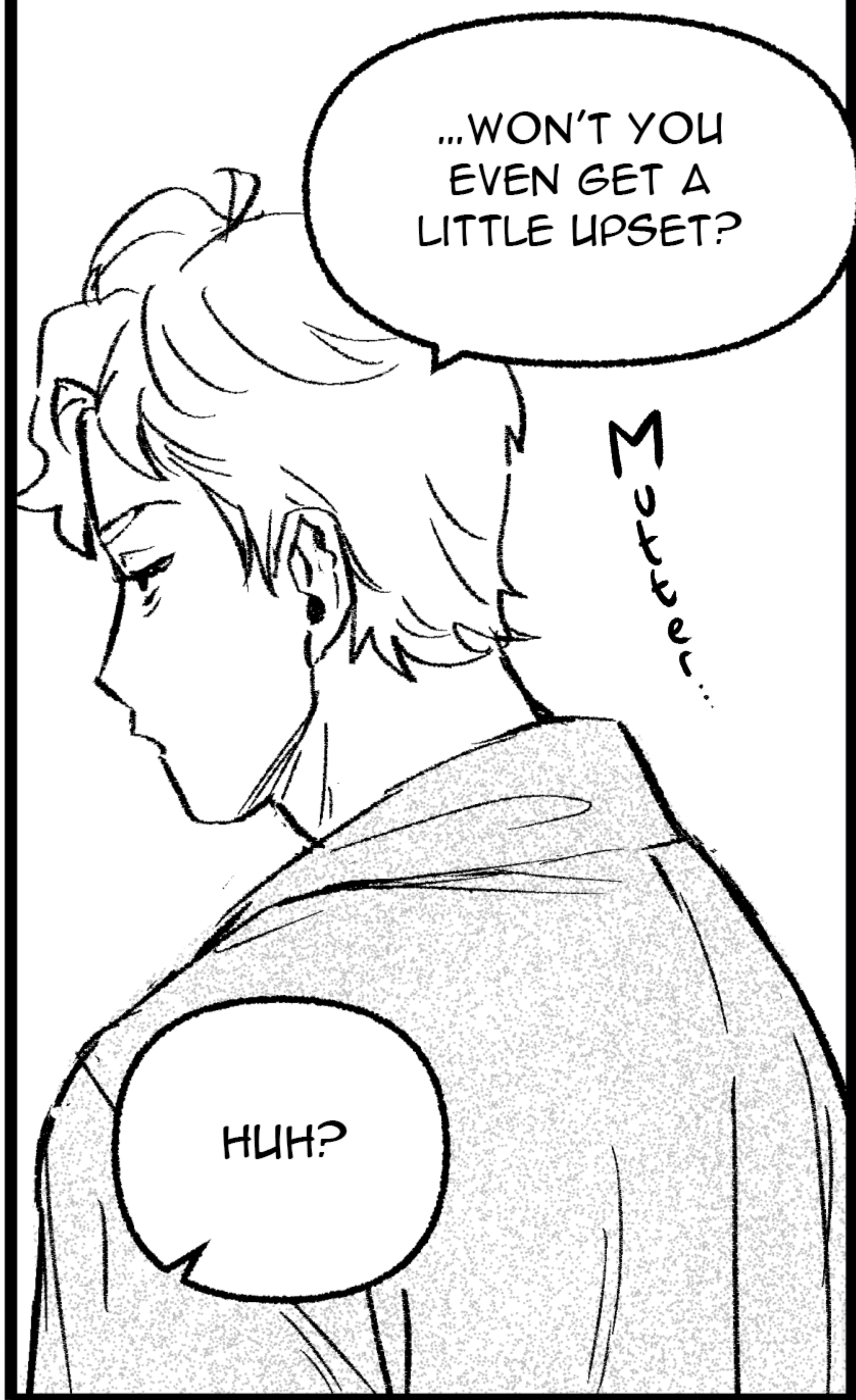
COULD IT BE THAT
YOU'RE FEELING
ILL?



NOT AT
ALL!

LEAVE ME
BE.

POFF!



WELL, IT DOES SEEM LIKE HE'S A FAIRLY COMPLICATED BLOKE, SO I WOULDN'T BE TOO CONCERNED.

DO YOU EVEN KNOW WHAT YOU COULD'VE DONE TO BOTHER HIM?

UH, WELL...

BAH, I'M SURE IT'LL BE FINE, AND YOU TWO WILL BE BACK TO PLAYING "CHESS" TOGETHER IN NO TIME AT ALL.

HAHA...

IF YOU WANT, I COULD BE YOUR PARTNER IN THE MEANTIME!

NO— BUT THANK YOU.

HAVE YOU TWO FINISHED STERILIZING THE EQUIPMENT?

OH, DR. STEVENS...

MR. MIKOTOBA.

...I SEE YOU'RE DISCUSSING YOUR PERSONAL AFFAIRS DURING WORK AS USUAL,

HEY... HAVE YOU DONE SOMETHING TO UPSET HER, TOO?

O-O OF COURSE I HAVEN'T!
...THAT I'M AWARE OF.

MR. MIKOTOBA,
THANK YOU FOR THE
FLOWERS YOU GAVE
MY DAUGHTER THE
OTHER DAY.

SHOCK

THE—?

...OH!

I WONDER IF SHE
WANTS THEM...

Stace...

...SO IT WAS ACTUALLY
QUITE A RELIEF TO FIND
SOMEONE WHO WOULD
TAKE THEM OFF MY
HANDS ALTOGE-
THER.

HERE YOU
GO!

NO, MY PLEASURE! I
HAD ACTUALLY BEEN
WONDERING WHERE
TO KEEP THEM...

HOW
PRECIOUS...

Hum Hum...

...DID SHE
ENJOY THEM?

WHEN SHE CAME
HOME WITH THEM,
SHE IMMEDIATELY
STARTED TO DIS-
SECT THEM.

OH, I...SEE.

WELL, THAT'S
GOOD TO
HEAR...

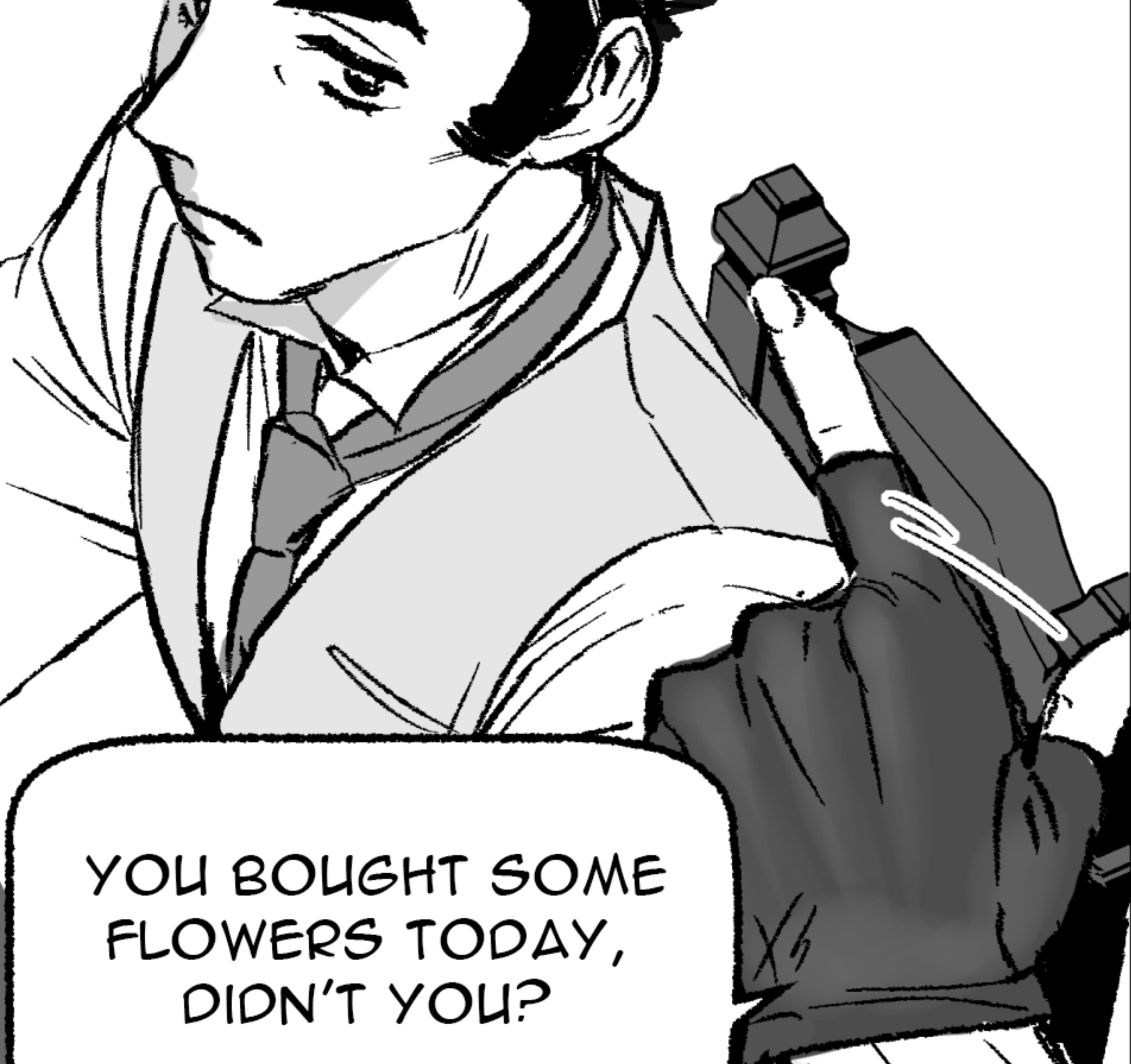
.....

...OH...

...AH, MIKOTOBA

?

?



YOU BOUGHT SOME FLOWERS TODAY, DIDN'T YOU?

IF MY DEDUCTIONS ARE CORRECT, YOU WERE PRES-SURED INTO BUYING THEM ON THE STREETS.



HOW DID YOU POSSIBLY...

COULD YOU SMELL THEM ON ME?

NOT QUITE.

WHILE IT MAY BE TRUE THAT I POS-SESS A MOST PERCEPTIVE AND SENSITIVE NOSE, EVEN I CANNOT ASCERTAIN ANYTHING BY SCENT ALONE WHEN YOU HAVE BEEN ABOUT CHEMICALS IN THE LABORATORY.

HOWEVER, IF ONE MAKES SIMPLE OBSERVATIONS, ONE CAN ARRIVE AT THAT CONCLUSION.



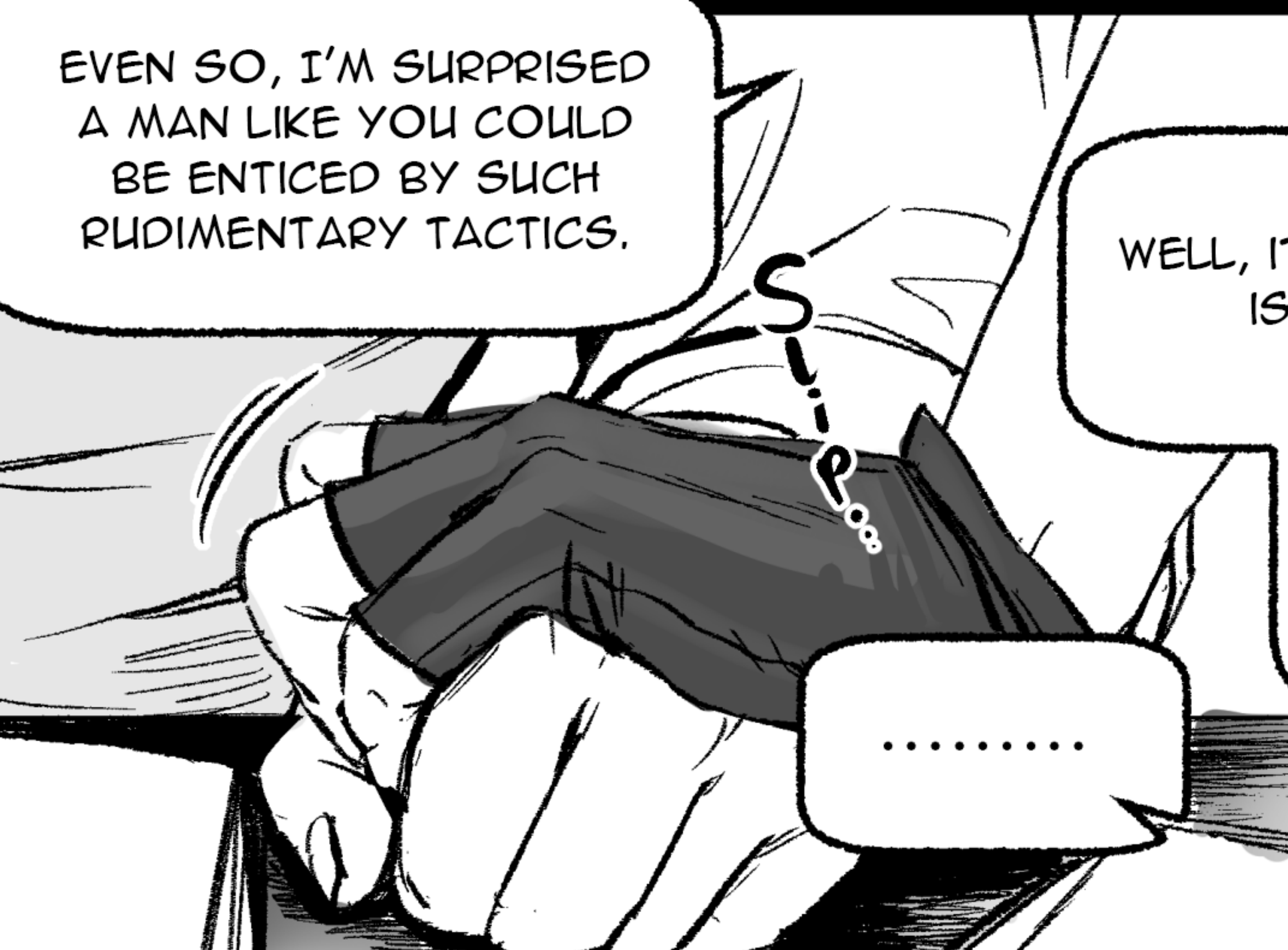
Sniff

Sniff

..."IT'S ELEMENTARY", THEN?

JUST AS YOU SAY.

EVEN SO, I'M SURPRISED A MAN LIKE YOU COULD BE ENTICED BY SUCH RUDIMENTARY TACTICS.



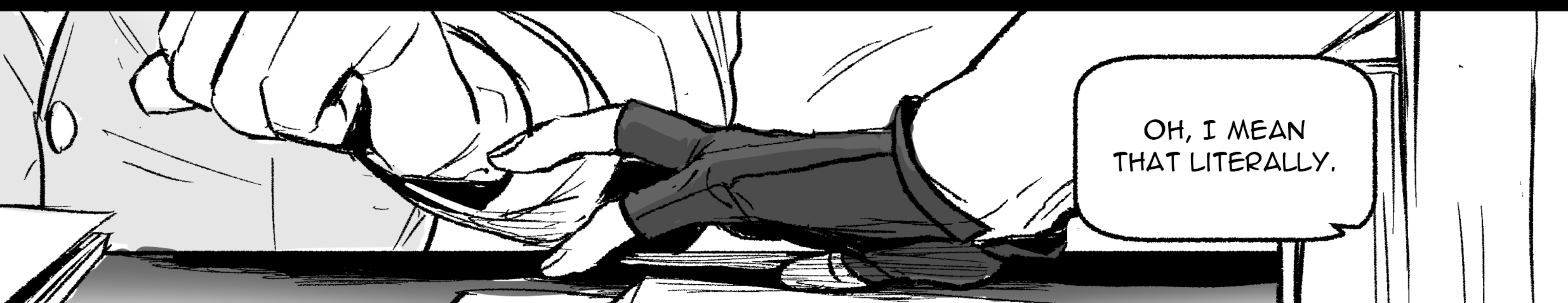
.....

WELL, IT'S ALL FINE, ISN'T IT?

THE FLOWERS DIDN'T GO TO WASTE IN THE END.



HOW SO...?



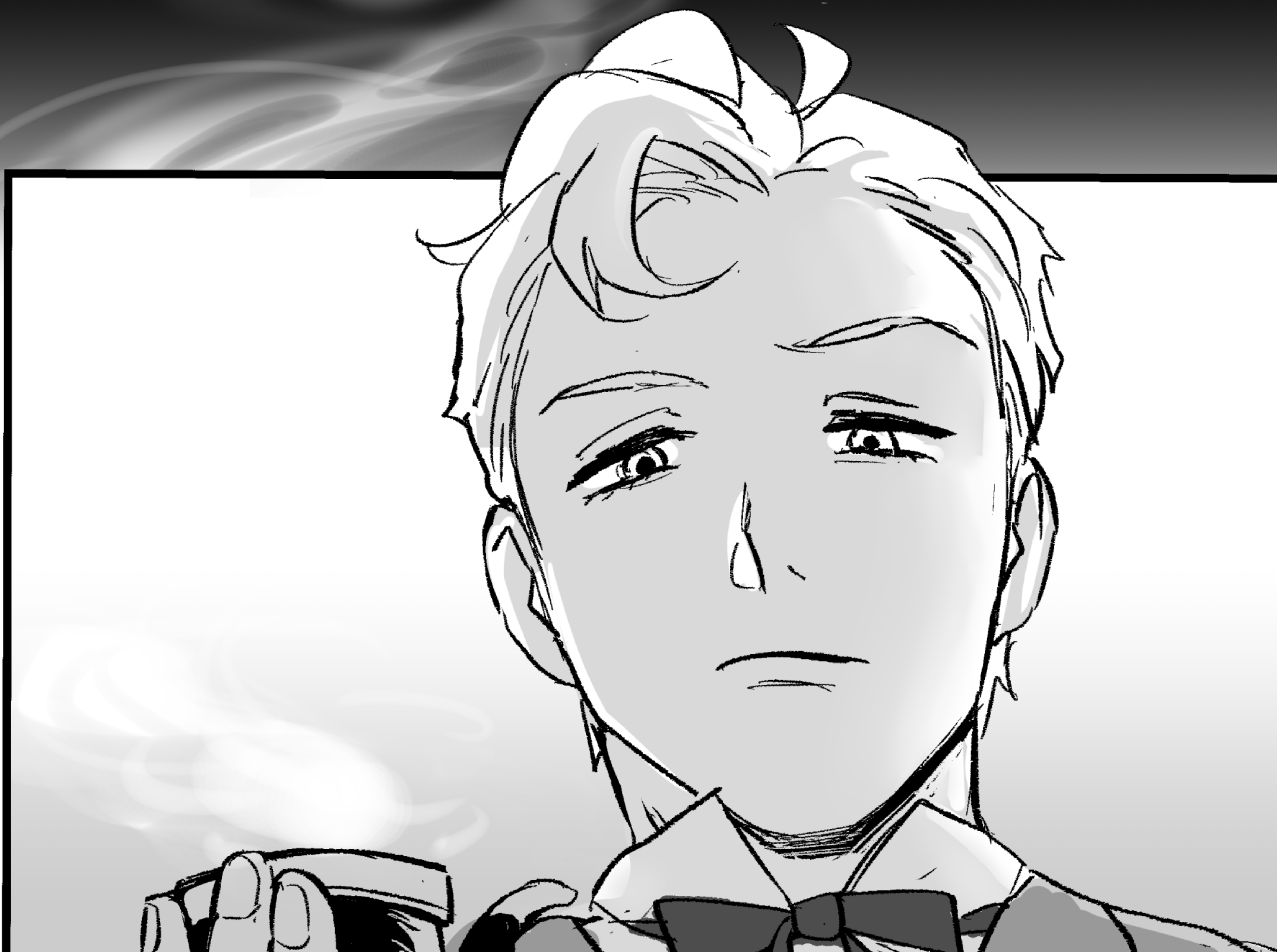
OH, I MEAN THAT LITERALLY.

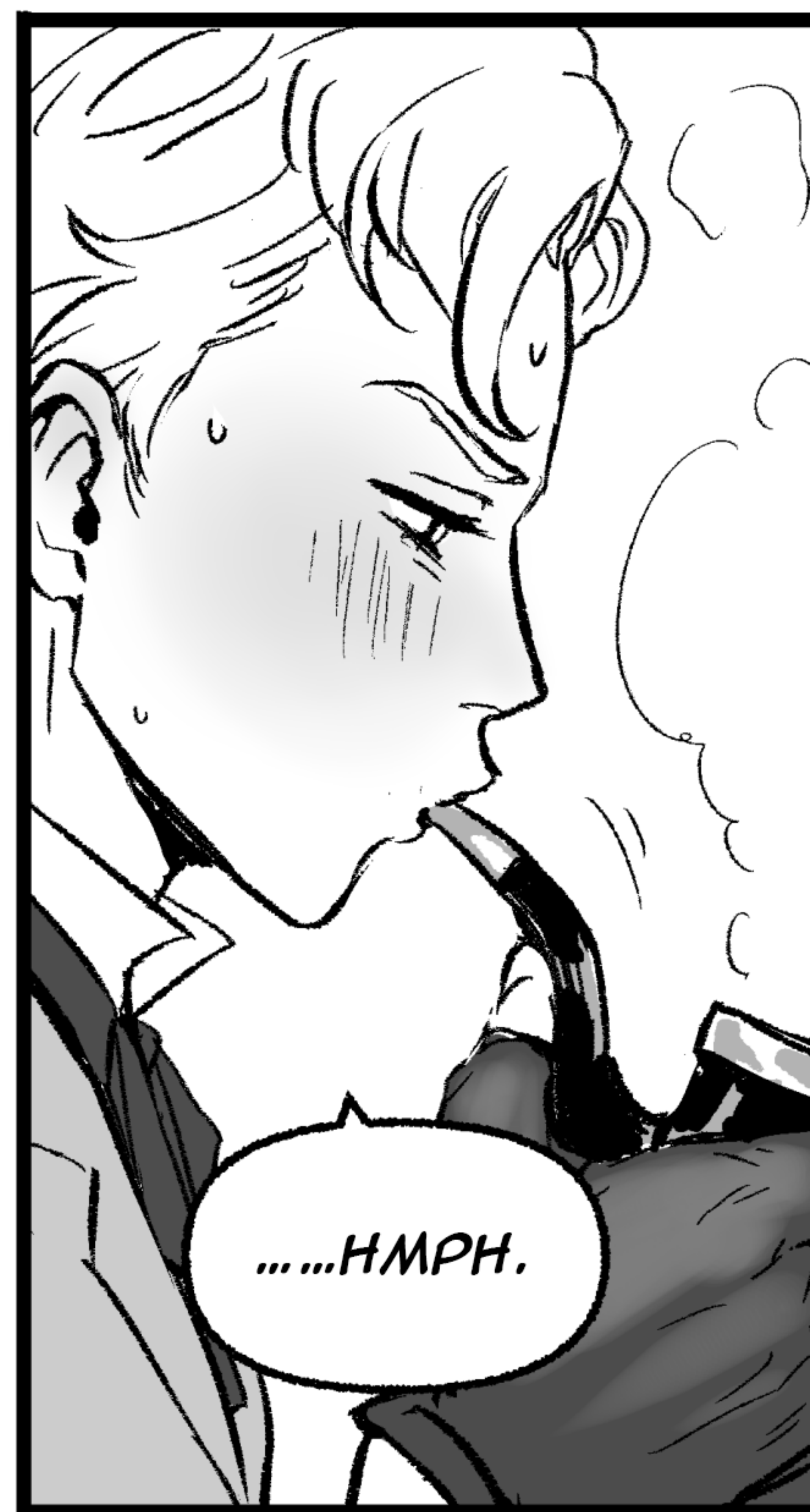
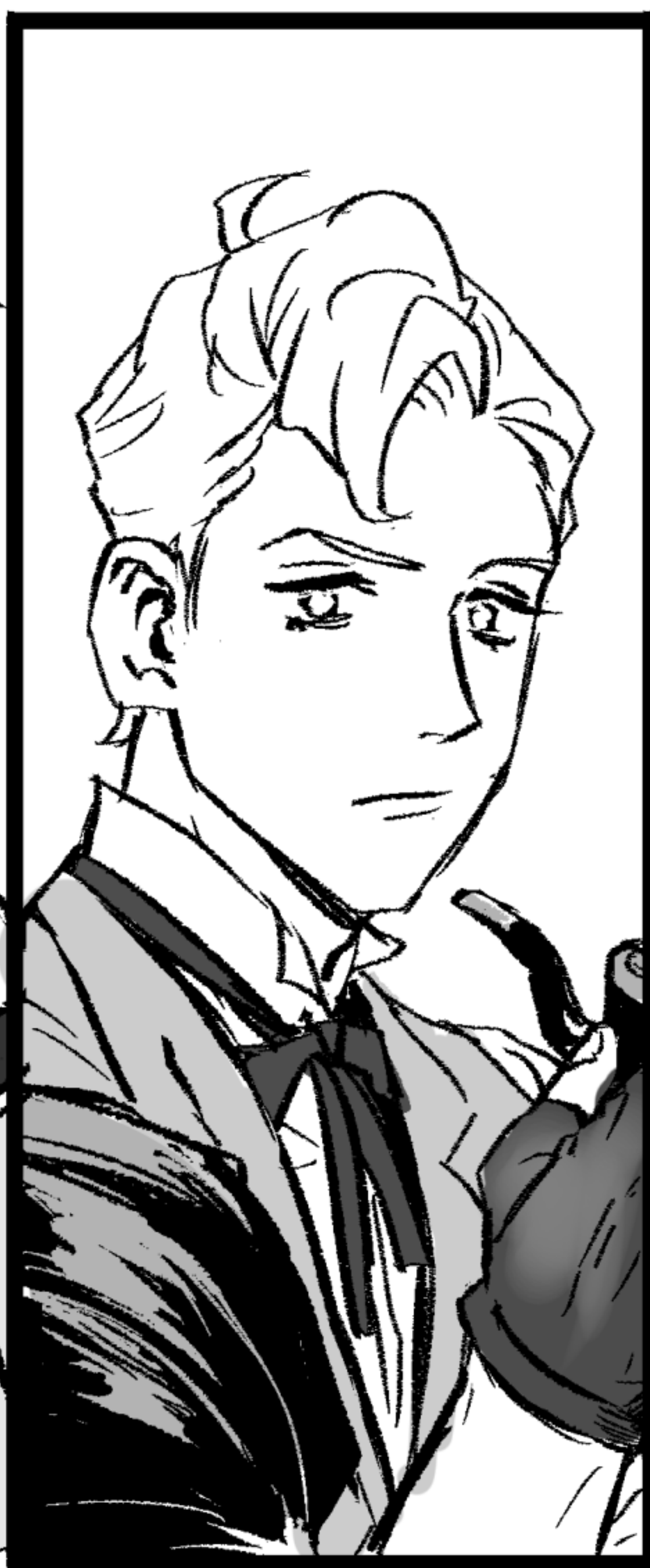


ALTHOUGH, RATHER THAN
SAYING THEY DIDN'T GO TO
WASTE, IT'D BE MORE APT
TO CALL IT ALL A BLESSING
IN DISGUISE...

Haa..

MY HEART HASN'T BEEN
MOVED BY SUCH A FACE
IN QUITE SOME TIME.









MIKOTOBA!



CAT

BOY

WHAT DID YOU
DO, HOLMES?



H-HOLMES...?
WHAT ARE YOU...

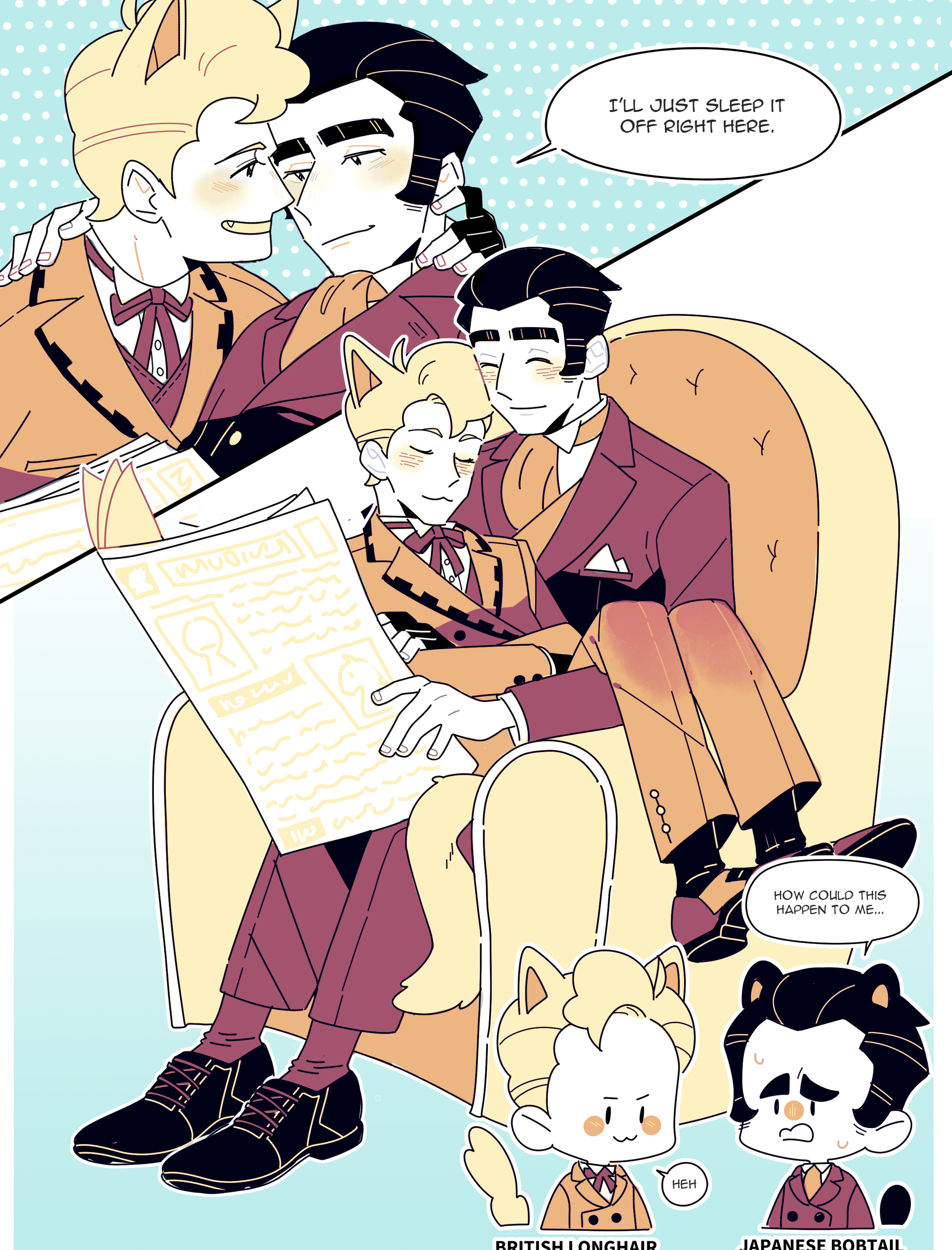


IT APPEARS THAT THERE MAY BE AN
UNFORTUNATE SIDE EFFECT TO ONE
OF MY RECENT EXPERIMENTS...

THAT MORNING

AHHHH

BOOM



BRITISH LONGHAIR

JAPANESE BOBTAIL



THE GREAT ADVENTURES OF SHERLOCK HOLMES





The Adventure of the Damascus Band of Cœur d'Cœurs

by Ribbonroad



Mikotoba had been getting more work done than usual. This is how he knew for certain that something was going on with Holmes.

When Holmes was on a case, it tended to be quite the opposite. It was a delicate balance for Mikotoba, spreading his time equally, making it rather difficult to maintain when he was so easily pulled into the role of investigative partner.

(Yes, he should probably put more emphasis on the job he actually came to London to do. But Mikotoba is only human.)

What was particularly odd about the circumstances he was under now was that it had all begun fairly typically. A woman by the name of Madam Wilkinson had come by with a case regarding a string of robberies at her jewellery store, and Mikotoba had been swept into the investigation faster than he could put together a written apology to Dr. Watson for his future absence.

He couldn't pinpoint when it started, exactly, but gradually Mikotoba found himself getting less and less involved with the case. Holmes would often head out without him, returning to 221B Baker Street without sharing much of his findings, and instead of mentioning anything about his train of thought to Mikotoba, he seemed to be keeping his

deductions in his own head. Mikotoba hadn't quite noticed at first; it wasn't as though Holmes had stopped talking to him, still bringing up the oddities or even non-oddities he'd witnessed in London on whichever day. But none of it related to the case. On occasion, Mikotoba would ask him about how things had been going with Madam Wilkinson's case, and every time, without fail, Holmes would reply, "Splendidly!" and not elaborate in the slightest.

There is a moment, despite how absurd, that Mikotoba worried he's done something wrong. That somehow, after all these years together, Holmes had decided he didn't need Mikotoba by his side. He knows it isn't a logical conclusion, but again, he is only human, and he can't help the occasional bout of self consciousness.

One day soon after that feeling had begun to set in, Holmes returns home from who-knows-where, ("where" having undoubtedly been related to the case and therefore not shared with Mikotoba). "I have returned!" Holmes announces, rather unnecessarily, because Mikotoba has been seated on the couch, watching him enter the room.

Mikotoba knows he'll be brushed off if he asks, "From where?" so instead he says, "Welcome home."

He expects Holmes to either run off or lead them into a new topic of conversation, so he's surprised when Holmes stands still and says nothing.

There's a strange sort of tension that fills the room as they share a gaze. Holmes' face is entirely unreadable, and Mikotoba can't imagine what sort of expression he has himself, but Holmes seems to see something in it. Mikotoba feels the silence is too delicate to break, but as time burns like candles in the quiet between them, he can't help but feel something needs to change, or who knows how long they could be there. "Holmes –" he begins.

He doesn't get the word out all the way before Holmes crosses the living room to stand in front of him, leaning forward and placing his hands on Mikotoba's shoulders. Mikotoba is once more stunned into silence, but this time, Holmes is quick to fill it. "Mikotoba!" It comes out rather loudly and suddenly, so he speaks his next words more softly. "You know how valuable a partner you are to me, don't you?"

"Ah – yes?" He does, and he doesn't. He knows that Holmes is certainly sincere when he says such things, and he's been saying as such with increasing frequency. But even now Mikotoba can't figure out what it is about him that Holmes had taken an interest in, especially given how few and how specific the things that did manage to catch Holmes' interest tended to be.

Holmes gives him a small, pitying look, as though he had read all that uncertainty written out right on Mikotoba's face. "So you trust me, Mikotoba?" he says. Mikotoba nods. "Then I'm going to need you to hold onto that trust for a little while more."

And Mikotoba does.

Holmes continues on his investigation alone, and while Mikotoba is still extremely curious to know

why he isn't involved, he's made peace with the fact that he would hear all about it from Holmes once it was over.

It comes a little quicker than expected, given how concerned he has gotten over the issue. Mikotoba has just begun standing to go make tea when the door opens quite abruptly and Holmes bursts into the room, looking far on the side of ecstatic.

"Prepare yourself, Mikotoba!" Holmes says, looking like he's ready to burst out of his own skin. "For tomorrow evening, we will be attending an exhibition!"

Mikotoba raises his eyebrows. He's heard about only one upcoming exhibition of note, and while it normally would have been quickly forgotten, it stuck because of just how relevant it was. "You don't mean – Madam Wilkinson's?"

"The very same!" Holmes says. "And we won't be the only guests of note at this event, oh no."

"You're going to corner the criminal there," Mikotoba realises.

As if it was even possible, Holmes looks even more euphoric, and he all but hops his way over to Mikotoba. "*We* are going to corner the criminal there!" he says, grabbing both of Mikotoba's hands on his own. Mikotoba adds *flustered* to the ever growing list of shocked emotions he's been going through since Holmes arrived.

"I – ah." Mikotoba struggles to get his bearings and voice his rational concern. "How will I be of any help? I don't know the facts of the case."

"Nonsense, you know the exact right amount of facts," Holmes says. That can't possibly be true, but he sounds remarkably confident. "Anything else, you need only follow my lead!"

Mikotoba decides he can keep trusting.



Mikotoba hasn't been in Madam Wilkinson's store often, but even he can tell it has been significantly redecorated for the event. There is still plenty of jewellery within glass cases, but they give more of an air of being a display rather than a potential purchase. There are, additionally, empty tables set out across the floor, most of which house several people making conversation.

One such person is Madam Wilkinson herself, being the target of chatter from a talkative man next to her. When she notices Holmes and Mikotoba have entered the store, she excuses herself quickly and makes her way over.

"Mr. Holmes! And Mr. Mikotoba!" While she seemed rather morose when she came to them with the case (as most people with cases tended to be), she seems positively delighted to see them now. She's an older woman, perhaps in her late forties or early fifties, with blonde hair pulled tonight into an immaculate tuck rather than the immaculate bun she'd worn when Mikotoba first met her. Her eyes then had been too dark with distress for Mikotoba to ascribe a colour for them, but now they're bright and teal. "Oh, I've just been so excited for your arrival!"

"And we're as pleased to be here as you are to be hosting us," Holmes says. It's not the first time he's said such a thing to keep on a client's good graces, but it sounds somehow more sincere than usual. Mikotoba is glad this is the day he finally gets to learn what is so particular about this case.

"Ah, and Mr. Mikotoba –" Madam Wilkinson says rather abruptly. "You've not had a full look around the store, have you? Goodness me, there's so much

I simply *must* show you."

Mikotoba glances at Holmes, who waves him off. "It's a lovely place, I have to agree that it's worth seeing," he says.

And yet he's never found it fit to discuss... Mikotoba thinks. It must show on his face, because Holmes gives him an apologetic smile. Mikotoba returns it with a smile of his own. "Well, I suppose I'm in no position to refuse." With that, Madam Wilkinson beams even more and takes Mikotoba by the elbow, pulling him further into the store.

As a guide, Mikotoba finds Madam Wilkinson's tour to be, as politely as possible, a tad lacking. She breezes past most fixtures that seem like they would be worth a closer look at, and answers all of his questions rather briefly. There is one particularly noticeable spot, where a heavy dark curtain reaches from ceiling to floor, and when Mikotoba asks about it he's told, "The main event!" and quickly breezes to the next location.

When Mikotoba is almost certain the bare-bones tour is coming to a close, Madam Wilkinson suddenly starts herding him toward a staircase. The entrance is blocked off by some rope, which Madam Wilkinson casually moves aside and places back when they've both entered the stairway.

Upstairs is rather more quiet than the ground floor, the bustle of people still audible but dimmed to a murmur. It isn't at all decorated, either; it's not quite sparse, because there are fixtures of jewellery behind glass even here, and Madam Wilkinson goes to stand in front of one.

Madam Wilkinson heaves a sigh in what might be relief, visibly relaxing her entire body. She glances lazily over her shoulder and says, "So... you and Mr. Holmes."

The change of subject is so abrupt that it takes

Mikotoba a few moments to process it. “What... What about Holmes?” he asks.

Madam Wilkinson turns around and leans her elbows on the glass case (which seems a bit precarious, but Mikotoba doesn’t bring it up). “He talks about you very often,” she says.

This comes as somewhat of a surprise; as little Mikotoba has heard about Madam Wilkinson’s situation, he’s expected Holmes to be as mum about himself. To hear otherwise is... well, he’s not quite sure where to place the emotion, but it’s certainly unexpected. “Ah, has he? Only good things, I hope.”

Madam Wilkinson seems to find something about that to be quite, quite funny. She covers her mouth with her hand as she giggles for quite some time before regaining her composure. “Well, yes, very good things indeed,” she manages between her laughs. “You two make quite the pair, I’m told.”

Mikotoba can’t help but feel his heart lighten; while he has placed his trust in Holmes, it touches him unexpectedly to hear that Holmes would tell even a client this. “I’m flattered, Madam Wilkinson,” he says. “Although I can’t honestly say I bring nearly as much as Holmes does...”

Madam Wilkinson has ceased laughing, but she still has a bright smile on her face. “Oh, I thought you might say as much,” she says. “I thought so when Mr. Holmes told me and I thought it just now; you really are as modest as my own partner.”

There are many aspects that Mikotoba has questions about, but he decides to focus on the one that centres the least around himself. “Your own partner?”

“Ah, yes, S – *ahem*. Madam Kitzinger,” Madam Wilkinson says. “She hasn’t been out at the exhibition – has never been one for crowds, really – but

she’s just as much the brains behind our store as I am.”

Mikotoba nods at her to continue, and Madam Wilkinson looks thrilled to have the go ahead to do so. “I’m just the face of it all really; I tend to the customers, she appraises gems and tracks the business,” she says. “But every day – you know what she says to me? ‘Without you by my side, none of this would come to fruition.’ As if her mind couldn’t run the world itself! Can you believe it?”

And Mikotoba can, because he’s thought very much the same of Holmes. He can’t help a fond smile from crossing his face. “How fortunate we are, to have such wonderful partners.”

As he says this, Madam Wilkinson’s expression shifts minutely. Mikotoba isn’t quite sure how to quantify it, but he feels as though he’s been met with... approval, perhaps? “We certainly are, Mr. Mikotoba,” she says. “And I wish for you and Mr. Holmes many more years to come.”

Before Mikotoba can reply, a door at the end of the hall abruptly opens, and a woman with frazzled dark hair and a loupe on her eye takes a step out. She pauses her movements when she sees Mikotoba and Madam Wilkinson, eyes widening enough that she has to bring a hand up to the loupe to keep it from falling to the floor. “Celi – it’s about to start! What are you two doing up here?” she hisses.

“Ah... *is* it?” Madam Wilkinson asks, blinking owl-ishly at the woman.

The woman nods frantically, then waves her arms to shoo them and hisses insistently, “Go, now now now! Come on!”

Madam Wilkinson instantly grabs Mikotoba’s arm and starts dragging him in the direction of the stairs. “Apologies, Mr. Mikotoba, time must’ve gotten away from me –” she says as they go, half

muttering to herself. Mikotoba barely has time to get the questions he *wants* to ask in order before they're back on the ground floor.

She abandons his arm with a small wave, leaving him behind in the crowd and weaving her way across the room. She picks up a glass and a piece of silverware as she goes, before coming to a stop on a raised platform in front of the floor-to-ceiling curtains from before. Raising the glass in the air and tapping against it, she waits for the crowd to turn its attention to her before she smiles broadly.

"A very good evening to you all! I must say, I am delighted and humbled by the interest my exhibition has garnered today," Madam Wilkinson announces to the crowd. "I find every piece to be quite special, myself, but I know there's one thing in particular that you've all been most eager to see."

An excited murmur runs throughout the crowd. As little as Mikotoba knows about the case, he has at least read what the prime attraction of the exhibition is. He isn't quite knowledgeable (or really all that interested) about jewellery, but he politely keeps his attention to see what it is Madam Wilkinson is now so passionate about introducing.

"And so, it is now that I present to you... The Damascus Band of Cœur d'Cœurs!" Madam Wilkinson says. The curtains part with a heavy flourish, revealing...

An empty display.

The crowd emotes in waves, from confusion to shock to disappointment to anger. Mikotoba, at least, isn't very surprised; the case was about missing jewellery, and now more jewellery has gone missing. He's far more interested in how Holmes is planning to solve this mystery.

Though as much as Mikotoba had been anticipating this, what he doesn't quite expect is for the

lights to dim, and for a spotlight to shine down upon Holmes, who is standing atop a jewellery display.

Concern for Madam Wilkinson's property arises, and Mikotoba attempts to make his way to Holmes to get him down, but the crowd is thick and Holmes has begun speaking long before Mikotoba makes it so much as an inch. He looks toward Madam Wilkinson, intending to make the beginnings of an apology, but pauses when he sees how incredibly unsurprised she is by all this.

"It may come as a surprise to you all, but for quite some time, our dear Madam Wilkinson has been beset with worry," Holmes begins. "Though she puts on a brave façade, the truth of the matter is: every time she attempts to share a rare find in her store, it is unremorsefully stolen, by one particular nefarious being."

The crowd falls into more shocked murmurs, but Holmes silences them with a snap. "But it is today that the criminal's reign comes to an end, and our madam will be freed from his terror," he says. "And upon what stage will this fiend be conquered? Why, only within Sherlock Holmes' latest 'Logic and Reasoning Spectacular!'"

The facts of the case, Mikotoba learns, are as follows:

The Damascus Band of Cœur d'Cœur was, as it turned out, a completely ordinary ring that Holmes had given an ostentatious name. Madam Wilkinson, with the help of Holmes, had set up an exhibition with the ring as the centrepiece, advertised it all across London to attract the thief.

Despite the ring lacking much monetary value, the thief had made multiple attempts to break into the store to steal it (having failed due to Holmes keeping the ring in his possession). As a real thief would

have likely looked into the price he could sell the ring for, it seemed that this thief wasn't interested in money, but rather in ruining Madam Wilkinson's exhibition. Thus, the thief was sure to arrive at the exhibition on the night itself in a last ditch effort to prevent Madam Wilkinson from presenting it.

"*But Mr. Holmes,*" Madam Wilkinson says dramatically, all pretence of this not being an elaborate performance dropping. "The ring is *already* gone, where could the thief *possibly* be?"

"Well," Holmes says. "I imagine he must be trying to make his escape during this distraction."

The spotlight shifts from Holmes, and instead lands on a man who is now very conspicuously trying to exit the building.

The man freezes, eyes darting around for a few moments. "Um... this is a coincidence," he says.

Nobody moves for a while, no one quite sure how they're meant to react to this turn of events. Finally, Mikotoba sighs and makes his way over to the man. "Well? Give it here."

The man chokes on a few of his words in a weak final attempt at resistance, before he reluctantly pulls a box from his jacket and drops it in Mikotoba's palm.

"Thank you," Mikotoba says, placing the box safely in his pocket. He glances up toward the source of the light; Madam Kitzinger is pointing it from the staircase. She waves when she sees Mikotoba notice her.

Mikotoba shakes his head with a quiet laugh, then looks back over toward Holmes. "The Yard is on their way then, I presume?"

"That they are!" Holmes leaps off the jewellery

stand, and Mikotoba winces for Madam Wilkinson's poor property once again. "And so our work here is done!"

Holmes makes his own way to the exit, stopping only to sling an arm around Mikotoba's shoulders and start dragging him along. Mikotoba knows it's a lost cause to explain how rude it is to cause a scene and leave immediately, so he settles for an apologetic wave to Madam Wilkinson and a mental note to write her a formal apology. Madam Wilkinson, for her part, doesn't seem terribly upset, smiling genuinely as she waves back.

The pair leave the building, taking a wide route around the Scotland Yard officers who have already arrived at the scene. "Excellent work as usual, my dear Mikotoba!" Holmes says, squeezing Mikotoba's shoulder against himself.

"But I didn't do anything," Mikotoba says, to which Holmes laughs boisterously.

As Mikotoba and Holmes return to 221B Baker Street, Mikotoba can't help but feel somewhat unfulfilled. The conclusion had been dramatic, certainly, but the case itself... Well, it didn't exactly seem all that unusual. For Holmes to have been keeping him in the dark for so long, he supposed he'd expected something a little... *more*.

But the case is closed, Madam Wilkinson is happy, and Holmes now wanders into the living room looking absolutely pleased, flopping down onto the couch with a wide, satisfied grin on his face. The clouds clear from Mikotoba's mood at the sight, and he decides whatever disappointment he had been feeling wasn't worth dwelling on.

"So? Was that not a wonderful Spectacular worth waiting for?" Holmes says.

"Hm, well, I'm certainly glad Madam Wilkinson's troubles have come to an end," Mikotoba says as

he follows Holmes into the living room. Almost as soon as he says that, he suddenly becomes aware of a weight in his pocket.

He reaches into it and indeed, the box is still there. He pulls it out, troubled. “Oh dear, it seems I’ve forgotten to return it...”

Holmes frowns and tilts his head. “Return it?”

Mikotoba isn’t certain why this is cause for questioning. “Yes, despite it not being as priceless as I’d believed, she must still be concerned to have any of her pieces missing.”

Holmes is quiet for a few moments, then begins to laugh heartily. “Ah, the ring was not merely part of the spectacle!” he says. “It is yours to keep, my dear Mikotoba!”

Mikotoba opens the box and looks it over. While it’s possible that he’s come out of this knowing even less about jewellery, it certainly is something to look at. “Well, that’s quite generous of her.”

“‘Generous...’ pah! Her assistance is dearly appreciated, but I feel my efforts deserved a discount on the price,” Holmes says, jovial expression falling into a pout. “‘I’m already paying for your help on the case, why would I sell it to you for any cheaper?’ she said. A businesswoman before a romantic, that one. Madam Kitzinger must be driven mad.”

Mikotoba opens his mouth, then closes it again. There are too many questions about every single thing Holmes had just said, and he struggles to focus on one. In the end, what he manages is, “... What?”

Holmes stares at him. Mikotoba stares back. “... Mikotoba,” he says eventually. He goes quiet for a few moments, then rises to his feet. “Mikotoba, do you... not know why you have that ring?”

Mikotoba tries to think about any other option besides the obvious, but he comes up short. “I... suppose I do not?”

Holmes crumples immediately, falling to the floor on his hands and knees and hanging his head down. Alarmed, Mikotoba hurries over to him. “Holmes! Holmes, are you –”

“‘I suppose I do not,’ he says... After all that planning...” Holmes says. He begins to laugh again, but it’s rather hollow. “So great a detective I am... could I have been wrong? How could I have possibly gone wrong?”

As far as Mikotoba’s patience has always gone, it begins to wane now that Holmes seems genuinely hurt. “Holmes, please, can you... can you tell me exactly what you mean?”

Holmes looks up, places a hand on Mikotoba’s shoulder and stares hard into his eyes. “I love you,” he says. “I love you, and I want to spend the rest of my life with you.”

Mikotoba would like to say it comes together like pieces of a puzzle. But it’s more that he had been gazing at a completed puzzle for ages, unable to parse a single aspect. It’s that someone had come and placed a pair of glasses over his eyes, and suddenly everything he had considered vague and formless is clear and solid.

If he weren’t already on the floor, his legs would have given out.

“Oh dear,” Mikotoba says, a laugh bubbling up within him. “Oh it’s so incredibly *you*... What kind of partner am I, that I wouldn’t see an elaborate proposal right in front of me?”

Holmes’ eyes soften. “You’re so hard on yourself,” he says. “Your presence is invaluable to my deductions; do you know how hard it was to do this with-

out you?”

“Well if that’s the case, then I suppose that’s not something you’ll have to worry about again,” Mikotoba says.

Holmes tries to keep his expression, but Mikotoba can feel the way his hand tightens and trembles. “So... So then, you...”

“I love you as well, Holmes,” Mikotoba says. He hardly gets the words out before Holmes’ arms are slung around his shoulders.

Had it been even mere days ago, when Mikotoba still attempted to hold a standard of decency with Holmes, he would have been quite flustered. And he isn’t *not* flustered, but it’s warm. It’s warm, and safe, and it is simply right.

Holmes seems to abruptly realise his sudden movement, letting go of Mikotoba and pulling away. “Ah – Sorry – I know that you – I just – Well –”

Mikotoba quiets him with a hand on his cheek. “I know,” he says. “I don’t mind.”

He leans forward, and presses their lips together. It catches Holmes off guard – rarely does Mikotoba have the ability to do so – and the response is two hands against his cheeks and Holmes’ lips pressing back against him.

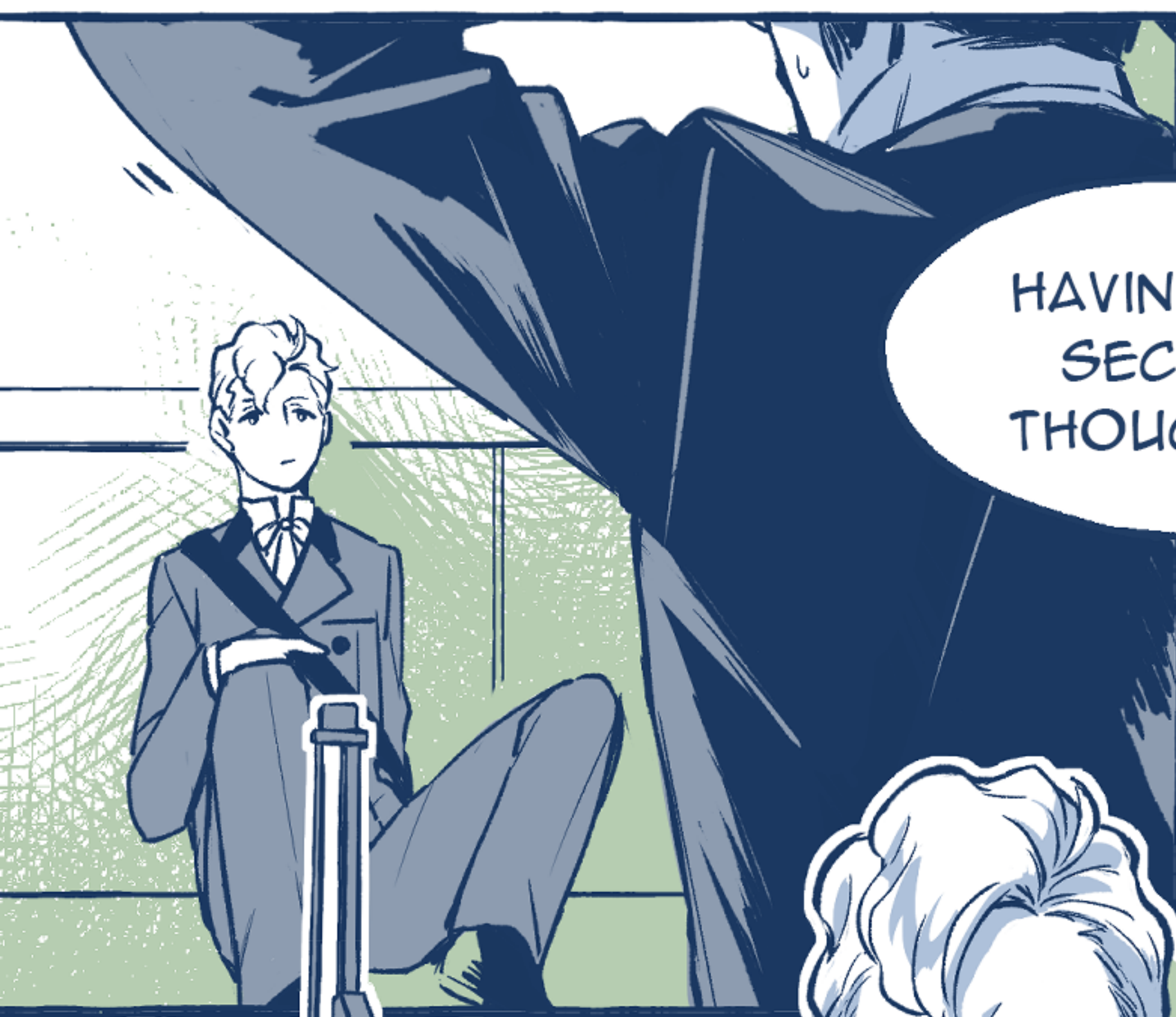




THE TIME APPROACHES.
PREPARE YOURSELF,
MIKOTOBA, FOR THE
SUSPECT MAY MAKE A
MOVE AT ANY MOMENT.



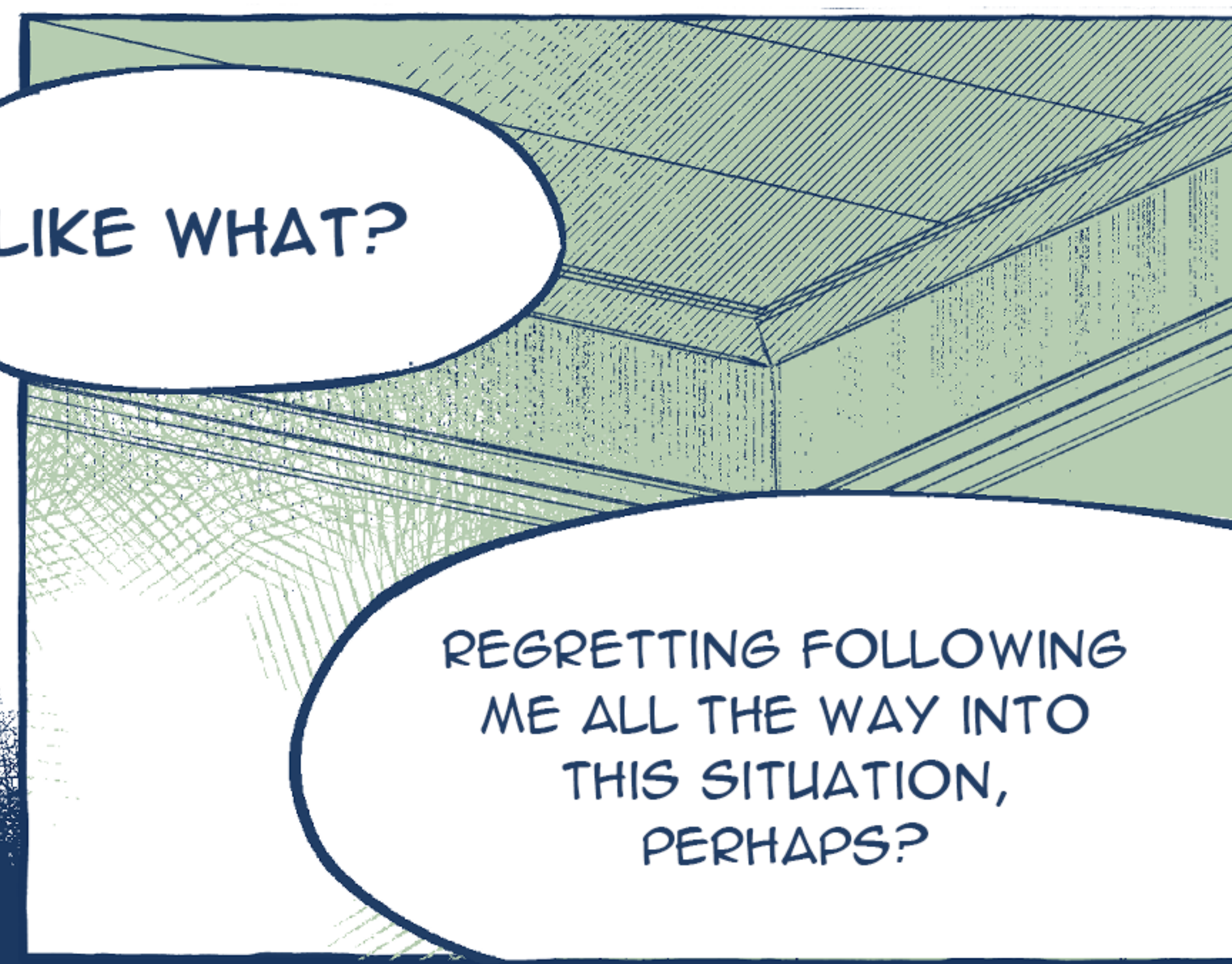
READY,
HOLMES.



HAVING ANY
SECOND
THOUGHTS?



LIKE WHAT?



REGRETTING FOLLOWING
ME ALL THE WAY INTO
THIS SITUATION,
PERHAPS?



TO BE PERFECTLY HONEST, I DO
HAVE SOME REGRETS OF MY
OWN ABOUT THIS.

THIS CASE IS A
DANGEROUS ONE. I
KNEW THAT.

AND YET, I STILL DRAGGED
YOU ALONG ALL THE WAY
INTO A PREDICAMENT LIKE
THIS.



...NO POINT IN
SAYING THAT
NOW.



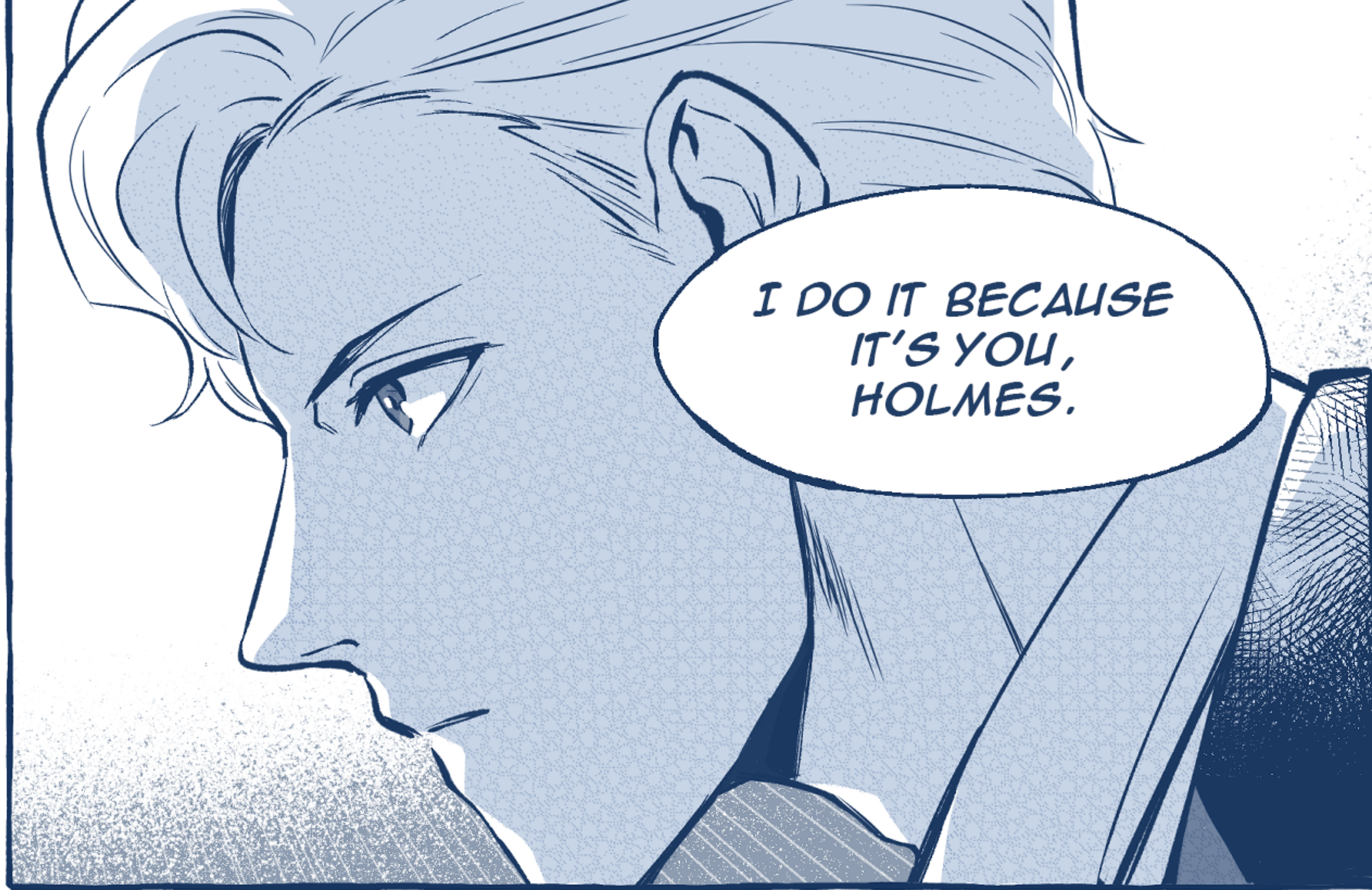
BESIDES,

DO YOU THINK I COULD
REGRET BEING HERE
MORE THAN I WOULD
ALLOWING YOU TO FACE
THE DANGER ALL ALONE?

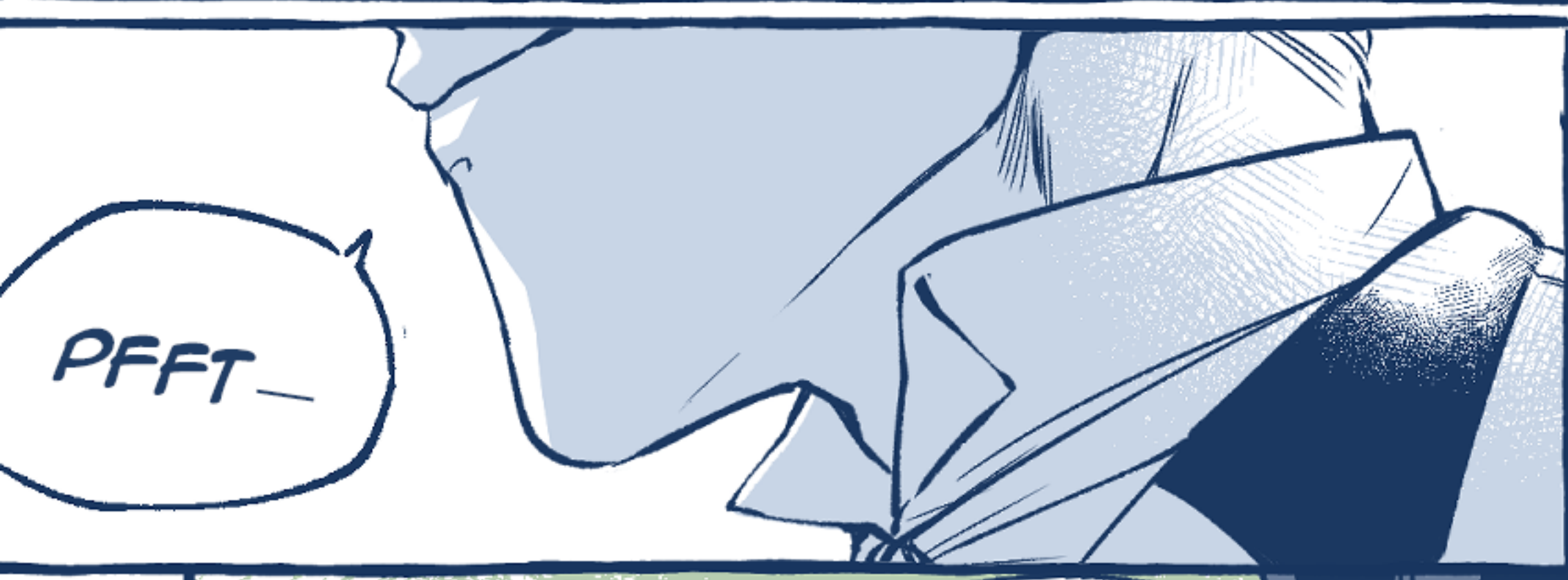




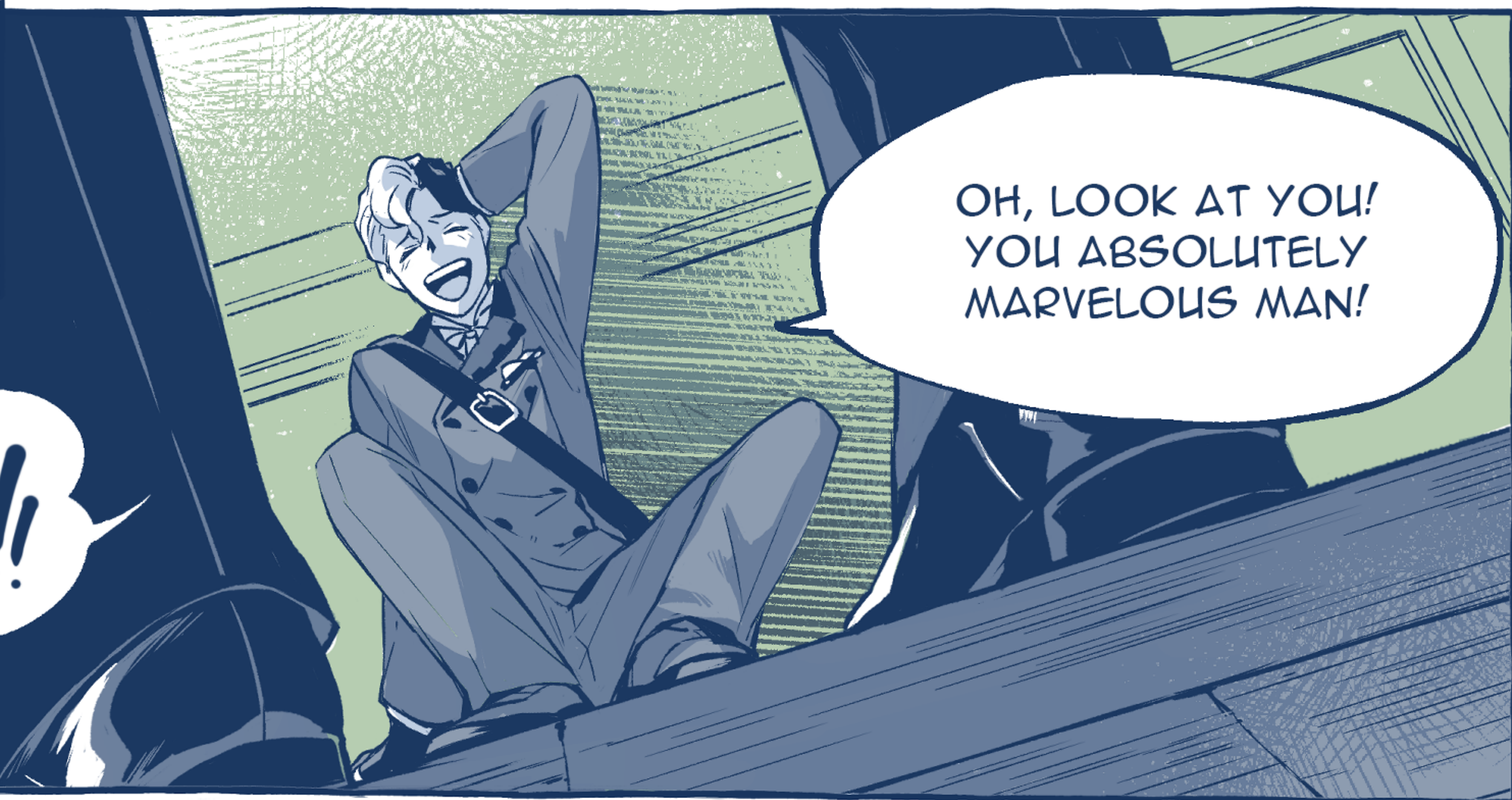
I AM FULLY AWARE THAT
I'M THROWING PRIDE AND
CAUTION TO THE WIND FOR
THE SAKE OF SOMEONE
ELSE RIGHT NOW.



I DO IT BECAUSE
IT'S YOU,
HOLMES.



PFFT—

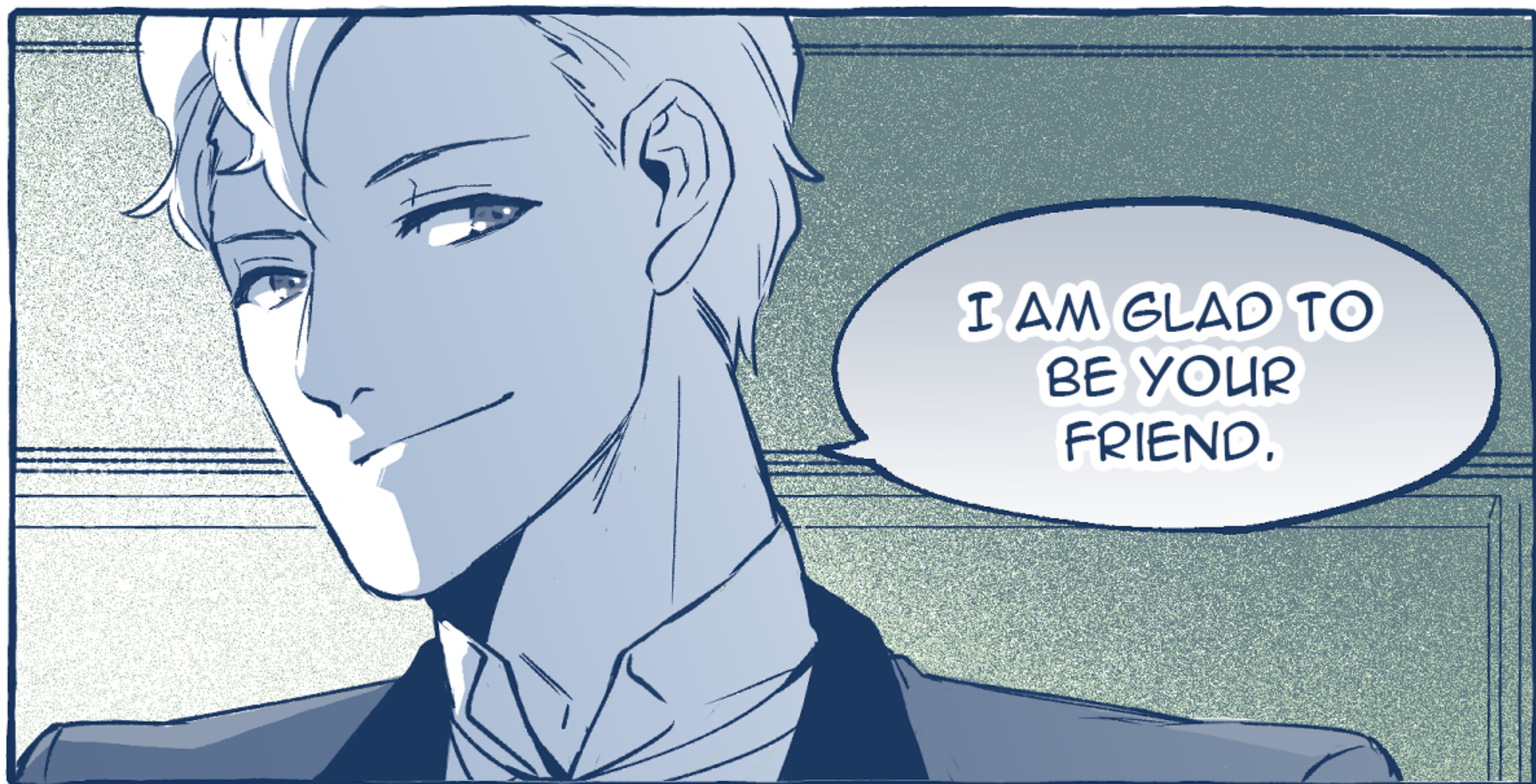


OH, LOOK AT YOU!
YOU ABSOLUTELY
MARVELOUS MAN!

Ah Ha Ha Ha!!



I TRULY MUST
BE THE LUCKIEST
MAN ALIVE.



I AM GLAD TO
BE YOUR
FRIEND.



FOR I KNOW THAT, IF IT
WERE YOU AND ME, WE
COULD JOURNEY EVEN
THROUGH THE DEPTHS
OF HELL.

MY DEAR
PARTNER!

— THE GAME IS AFOOT! —

Seeing Red

by Mak



The streets of London had the unusual ability to sour and soak the very air above them. An acrid smoke wound its way, snake-like and stifling, from the many residential and commercial buildings housed next to them. Sounds of shop vendors peddling wares wove between conversations, squeaking wheels, the bray of horses, and the occasional shout of a bobby after a thief. Even the brightest colour on a London street carried a trace of grey, saturated like a poppy's petals if the stem was placed in a tin of ink. But such were the London streets, every day. Such was the ordinary, and not a resident thought differently about that Tuesday afternoon.

The only people who may have seen the day as extraordinary were Sherlock Holmes and Yuujin Mikotoba as they sat in a carriage travelling down Hanover Road with their hands bound in handcuffs in front of them. And, Mikotoba pondered, perhaps they were the only two men in London who wouldn't.

He studied the two men in front of them. One, a grimy-looking ruffian, likely somewhere in his thirties, though the angles and wrinkles of his face made it hard to accurately pinpoint it. That's the rub with poverty: it aged men far more than their richer counterparts, sharpened the points of their crow's feet into angry daggers. His dark hair was

slicked back, the roots at the front yanking the forehead and eyebrows into a facsimile of a surprised expression. A fine sheen of sweat shone across his face, drops of it occasionally sliding underneath his collar. In his left hand, he gripped his right forearm, keeping it held steady as the carriage bobbed around them. In his right hand, a Bull Dog Revolver, the barrel staring its black eye at Holmes' left breast pocket.

The other man looked the part of an esteemed gentleman. His well-coiffed hair shone a brilliant gold in the occasional glimpses of sunlight that passed into the vehicle, a few strands shaking free to tap at his unblemished cheeks and forehead. His appearance conveyed a man modest in his wealth: a well-pressed suit with a red pocket-square, comfortable slacks with flecks of country-estate dust across its bottom hems, a bronze chain as opposed to a golden one sneaking its way into view from his vest pocket. For any passersby, he looked like a man well-acquainted with the elite of London.

It was only Mikotoba, Holmes, and some esteemed members of Scotland Yard who knew that the very opposite was true. This was Mr. Samuel Carlette, a prolific thief, swindler, and arsonist who had been plaguing both the upper and lower crust of the city for the past year. It was only recently that Holmes had made the connection between a series of unre-

lated illegal incidents to the man truly behind the curtain. In fact, the duo had arranged a stakeout of a location the man's underlings were likely to burgle in the next few days.

It was only upon leaving the stakeout location, distractedly chatting about a good location for a very late dinner, that the two were met with the cool barrel of a gun sticking out of a cart window, only a handkerchief keeping the nearby bobbies from seeing it. With a wink and a wave inside by Mr. Carlette himself, the two were forcibly invited inside. Their hands were cuffed, their pockets were emptied, and their noble guard was notably absent.

Well, that was a day in the life for the Legendary Pair. At least Mr. Carlette seemed to think himself pleasant company, smiling at the two of them with brilliant teeth and making the occasional comment about a new business opening in a building the carriage passed. His mook was far less charming.

Hard to be that charming with a gun, Mikotoba supposed.

After about 20 minutes of travel, Holmes shifted slightly in his seat, his hand scratching at his pant leg as he sought more space next to Mikotoba. A universal symbol of discomfort, and one that Carlette recognized.

"Something troubling you, Great Detective? I'd hate for this sojourn to leave you unwell," the man said, tilting his head in a facsimile of sympathy.

Oh, as if your own seat isn't made from imported cottons, thought Mikotoba with disgust.

Holmes made a small wave of his shackled hand, trying to feign a dismissal, before sighing and leaning forward. "Great apologies, sir, and I have been enjoying your company thus far. Do not misunderstand my motions for those of boredom or apathy. I am, ah, I'm afraid that I have a terrible tobacco

habit," he said, his voice breaking just slightly on the word 'habit.'

Mikotoba knew this routine. Every word and gesture was preplanned, every hitch of his cadence calculated. He wanted to appear composed, but at a slight edge without the soothing of the pipe. It was a gentleman's quandary, nothing untoward. A hook.

A hook which Carlette had no problem piercing his lip through. "Ah? Yes, yes, tobacco. One of the sins of the modern man, I'm afraid, but an understandable one for you, Mr. Sherlock Holmes. You have been working quite hard to undermine the last two meetings of some of my associates," he said, lowering his head and giving Holmes a knowing look. "However unintentional that may have been."

Holmes laughed, easy and relaxed. "Naturally unintentional, my dear sir! A simple walk with the two of us does always end up interrupting someone's daily functions, I'm afraid. The pair of us always seem to find our way into some trouble." He tapped at his right breast pocket. "Of the tobacco. I have a pipe, but no match. I don't know if I could trouble you for one? You'd permit me a simple puff or two to quell my nerves, wouldn't you? I do get jittery on long carriage rides, and I'm afraid you've neglected to tell us the planned temporal window of arrival, Mr. Carlette."

The man nodded his head, giving his lackey a quick look ('don't move your gun away'), and reached a hand into his jacket pocket. "Naturally, good sir. Perhaps this will assuage your nerves of an arrival time as well. Haven't you heard?" He laughed, pulling a match and striking it, the flame greedily consuming its home. "It's not the destination. It's the journey."

Their captor leaned forward, offering out the match, as Sherlock reached into his own pocket to carefully

remove his pipe. The smooth, dark wood reflected the orange of the match with an almost enchanting quality, illuminating flecks and hollows inside the instrument that couldn't normally be seen in the dim light of the apartment the men shared. Mikotoba found himself almost taken in by the light, especially as it tipped down to encircle and consume the packed tobacco inside the bowl. Holmes' face came down over the pipe slightly, checking to see whether it had buried itself far enough down to engulf all the tobacco.

But not quite. He knew this game as well, and kept Holmes' other hand in his peripheral view. While the right held the pipe, the left moved to its side, and then over to the pocket of Mr. Carlette, quickly and silently. Both men had seen the tiny iron key that locked their shackles disappear into that very pocket, and Carlette hadn't moved it in the time they'd been sitting captive. Another practised trick that would give them an advantage later, whenever they earned a moment unobserved.

Unfortunately, that was not this moment. In a flash of movement, Mr. Carlette's other hand suddenly struck out like a viper, his two forefingers and thumb closing around Holmes' wrist like fangs. His head dipped slightly, just enough to see the hand's planned destination. He tutted softly. "Now, Mr. Holmes, you should know better than any the value of a man's privacy."

If Holmes was taken aback by his plan's discovery, he hid it well, sliding back into a charming, if a bit embarrassed, smile. That was the luck of his boyish, young features: he could wear any face perfectly well, sweet-talk himself out of nearly any misgiving. Mikotoba often envied that about him, though he hoped he never stopped using it, especially now.

"Oh, my apologies!" he said, boisterous and con-

fident. "I was sure I had asked if I could also see that watch of yours. That lovely chain bound my attention in its shining links, my good man, and I just couldn't help but wish to see the timepiece it led to. I'm sure it's a stunning piece, and I'd love to ask where you g—"

"Mr. Holmes, do be quiet."

The simple request resonated in the cart. People walked by outside, and the wheels continued to move, but no one in the carriage even dared to breathe after the low, rumbling request of Mr. Carlette. His jovial, friendly gaze iced over in an instant, the flame sputtering out as it reached the tips of his fingers. If it had burnt, he made no indication, keeping an unwavering gaze on Holmes' eyes. To his credit, the detective stared back, uncowed in his silence.

"Mr. Holmes, I am a caring man. I am an understanding man. I am a friendly man. But I am no fool." He dropped the match on the floor of the coach, reaching over to grasp Holmes' hand within his. The tendons on his wrist tensed, and Mikotoba heard an almost imperceptible groan from his partner. "I do not play this game with fools." Another tense, another flinch. "And I expect that my opponents will not try simple parlour tricks" – a squeeze, definitively harder, and an exhale from Holmes, the sweat building on his brow – "to gain an upper hand. Is that understood?" he asked, a steely gaze still snaring Holmes to his seat.

A few seconds of pause. The wheels turned beneath the four, catching on a patch of loose cobblestones, sending them tumbling into the gutter. Mikotoba looked to Holmes, watching his mind make all the calculations it needed to. What did he lose by agreeing? What did he gain?

Then, a nod. Carlette released the hand, a smile finally wiping clean the tension of the last few sec-

onds. “Good! Good. I’m glad to hear you agree. So nice to have civilised guests, isn’t it, Duncan?” He gestured up to the gun-toting man, who slowly nodded to Holmes.

Mikotoba’s shoulders slumped as Holmes flexed his fingers. Holmes gave him a reassuring look.

I suppose we didn’t lose much by agreeing, Mikotoba thought, his gaze trained to Holmes’s sky-blue eyes. They had that newfound fight back in them. They may make it through this encounter. They didn’t get the key, but they knew the people they spoke to could be reasoned with. That was a start, at least.

Crack!

And then all that semblance flew out the carriage window as Mr. Carlette reached over and snapped Sherlock’s pinkie finger roughly to the side.

The detective’s eyes went wide, and a scream tore its way from his throat as he quickly darted a hand over to push the pinkie back into place. Mikotoba flew through a flurry of emotions: anger, concern, and abject fear. He leaned forward to check the digit, his hand moving to secure its placement. Almost without thinking, he tore off a section of his shirt’s hemming (farewell, five months of wages) and wrapped it around Holmes’ ring and pinky fingers. A makeshift splint. That was all they had.

He looked back up as he heard a chattering voice. Carlette, as if indifferent to the sudden plight, had taken to commenting about a building they were passing by.

“My goodness, has Ballywick’s really opened up again? I swore that they were condemned for certain this time, after their terrible spring sales. I suppose time will tell if they last out the winter, eh, doctor?” His first addressing of Holmes’ companion, which he punctuated with a wolf-like grin,

baring each glittering tooth. *I see you, little morsel*, each of them snarled.

Two thoughts occurred to Mikotoba.

This man is mad.

And,

We are in grave danger.

“Time will tell, indeed,” he muttered.

The carriage rolled on.



Well, I can’t say this is my favourite of circumstances, Mikotoba thought as he struggled against the cuffs once more. When the pair had reached the abandoned sugar mill, Carlette had instructed his mook to adjust their bindings, firmly securing their hands behind their backs and up against two very uncomfortable chairs. In the meantime, Carlette had stood akimbo, his hand lazily curled against the gun. The opportunity had been present to attempt a daring escape: overpower the mook while Holmes wrestled the gun from the mastermind’s hands.

But the carriage ride had shaken them both. Mikotoba stole glances to Holmes, as the two waited for Carlette to return from a back area. The makeshift splint was holding, but beads of sweat traced paths of soot down Holmes’ face. He was not as composed as he usually was, nor as wild in the eyes. A resilience and fortitude had settled about his form instead.

Endure, the posture calmly stated. *I will find a way.*

Which meant Mikotoba was back to his struggling. His main objective now was to pull a small pin from beneath his cuff: the safeguard the two had taken

to carrying in case of an incident like this. It was sewed in with three basic threads, which could be easily snapped in a dire situation. Criminals had taken to adopting the police's methods of binding, which meant Mikotoba and Holmes each had ample opportunity to learn the locking mechanism and how to circumvent it. A slide here, a pop there, and the latch would give way to the sweet exhilaration of freedom.

At least, that was the hope, hence the fiddling. Just another stretch of his fingers into his sleeve, and...

He paused, feeling the pin fall into the palm of his hand just as the far door opened and Mr. Carlette walked out. Mikotoba straightened in his chair, using the motion to disguise transferring the pin to his left hand. The latch was across the right wrist, and positioning was vital.

Now, to wait for another reprieve from Mr. Carlette's icy stare.

"Well! I hope you are finding your seating arrangements comfortable, the two of you," said their captor. "I had some brief business to take care of, what with you interrupting a very important sale some nights ago, but now I can devote my attention solely to my guests." He looked between the two of them, clearly expecting a response.

Mikotoba said nothing. Holmes spit a dollop of phlegm onto the ground in front of him. He then spoke, with no disguising the shake in his voice, "How kind of you. Now, why are we here, Samuel?"

Carlette smirked, raising an eyebrow and placing a splayed hand to his chest. "Why, Holmes, what happened to your candour? I was quite enjoying our cordial conversation before. I would so deeply relish the chance to return to that."

"You broke," Holmes gasped out, eyes suddenly sparking with fury. "*My hand.*" He gulped in another

breath before letting his gaze drop to the ground in front of Carlette, gritting his teeth. The man was definitely shining with sweat now, his body shaking with exertion.

Mikotoba gulped. This was either a highly convincing performance, a way of making himself seem far more hurt than he was, or a slipping of the facade. Mikotoba knew Holmes well, and even he could not tell which. All the more vital to work out their escape plan, then.

He took in the interior of the old cotton mill as Carlette started babbling about his reasonings and master plan. ("Now, you may be wondering why I've brought you both here for an evening soiree," or something to that effect. The monologue got rather droll after the fiftieth confrontation.) The walls were constructed of brick and mortar, though the years had slowly pulled them from their sturdy uniformity. Discarded spinning wheels lay scattered about the floors, the tethers connecting them to the overhead shafts now hanging loose from the ceiling. Mikotoba could see two oak-door exits: one through the way they came in, and one that Carlette had disappeared into moments before. Though the building itself was old and decrepit, the force of one man alone could not break through the walls.

The best way out was the door thirty feet away, Mikotoba decided.

He then looked to their captors. Samuel Carlette, boastful as he explained his machinations, the gun now gone from his hand. Arrogant, but still a key threat, especially since that gun may still be on his person. The mook, no less sweaty in the enclosed mill than in the carriage, paced at the entrance, keeping his eyes firmly on the two captors. His presence there indicated a worry about the authorities arriving.

Good. We're not so far away that Scotland Yard can't

sniff us out, Mikotoba thought, which brought him to his next analytical step. Why were they brought here? Why not drag them to a quarry and shoot them? He refocused on Carlette's words.

"...on good record that you intrepid detectives know a thing or two about the Yard. Now, I've got my hands in quite a few pockets over there. In fact, I would say that I've made a friend or two, and I know they haven't sung a pretty little note about my business enterprises. And yet! I find officers around one of my favourite locations of leisure, which means you kept this investigation rather quiet." He walked forward, placing a hand beneath Holmes' chin to tilt it up. "And I know that can be rather hard for you, detective."

A snap of movement, and Carlette's hand jolted back. It took a moment for Mikotoba to register that Holmes had tried to *bite* the finger, a dishevelled, angry look in his expression. A searing contempt moved through him. The man was toying with two of the most capable investigators in London, with nothing but a pistol and some cuffs. Holmes, behind all the gusto, must have felt mortified.

"So! You're going to tell me who on the force you have informed, or we are no longer going to be on such cordial terms," Carlette finished, lacing his fingers in front of his chest as he gazed between the two.

Holmes held the man in his sight, having regained some of his composure over the course of the explanation. Mikotoba looked sidelong at him, trying to keep an expression of fear on his face as he looked for Holmes' fingers. The man had likely finished fishing the needle from his sleeve by this point, the point trained to the latch. His own was likewise prepared. When Carlette turned his back, Holmes would spring up and overpower him, while Mikotoba ran for the door and occupied the henchman.

A manoeuvre the two had performed a hundred times before.

A manoeuvre complicated somewhat by the fact that Holmes had dropped the pin.

Mikotoba's eyes widened by a fraction of an inch. Silver light glinted on the ground beneath Holmes' feet. It was completely out of reach! A hiccup, but not a disaster. They each carried two pins with them, in the case of a blunder like this. Holmes would simply have to stall a little longer as he grabbed the pin from his right cuff –

Which would be significantly more difficult with the broken finger.

The doctor's eyes darted to Holmes, who had his eyes trained on Carlette. With a hitched breath and a sudden, easy smile, his words trailed out with only a hint of strain. "Mister Carlette, do you not suppose, with my many connections throughout the city, that you found yourself surrounded not with patrolmen and bobbies, but with your average Toms and Nancys? If I was behind some sort of... heroic unmasking, as I'd interpret it, wouldn't it be better that I keep it away from a compromised Yard?"

As he spoke, his fingers fiddled with his cuffs. His verbal sparring, usually exuberant and flippant, now wobbled like a stricken chord. Mikotoba watched the hands slip in and out, finding nothing. He readied his own pin as Carlette stepped forward, jamming it under the latch and preparing to flip it.

"Well, if you did happen to find only Nancys and Toms, perhaps you should inform them that their brooches, so haphazardly tucked beneath their jackets, looked quite a bit like badges." Carlette's smile never reached his eyes. "Names, Mr. Holmes. Before I grow tired of asking."

Holmes' unfaltering gaze tilted just slightly to the

side. “Not to show my overtly grammatical side, my dear fellow, but I don’t believe that was a question. Might you reph – phrase it?”

A stutter, just slightly, as the second pin fell from his grasp. Holmes shifted just slightly to catch it between his fingers, just before it clattered to the ground.

Well, not between, precisely. In. Mikotoba watched him wince as the tip pierced flesh and crimson began to well up to the surface, then drip down.

The splatter of blood against the ground, in that grand empty mill, was enough to give the game away.

A flash of movement, and suddenly a barrel stared down Holmes, shining in Carlette’s grip. Sherlock Holmes stared it down, unmoving, as the hammer clicked back, horror contorting his whole face. A surge of white-hot anger wrestled its way through Mikotoba, clambering against the confines of his bones and joints, begging to be released.

“Well, Mr. Holmes. Let’s see if this phrase meets your grammatical standards,” Carlette said. “You’ve sealed your fate. Prepare to meet your maker.”

“NO!”

Click!

But it was not the hammer that pulled back from its fateful position underneath the villain’s finger. It was the draw of the latch as Mikotoba barreled forward, slamming into Carlette and sending the gun clattering across the room. He wrestled the man down to the ground, securing his hands against his chest before pressing the fine end of the needle to his neck.

Distantly, he heard a surprised cry from Holmes and the clumsy padding of feet. The mook, sent to

fetch up the revolver.

“Call him off,” he said, calmly, looming over Carlette, who sputtered in confusion.

“Wha – you – you can’t tell me –”

“Call him OFF or I will show you the exact knowledge of the human body’s fallacies and weakness that I possess, Samuel,” Mikotoba hissed, lowering himself closer to the man’s pitiful face. “I am a learned man of medicine. I have studied many cadavers. I trust you do not wish to join their ranks.”

The footsteps ceased. A shout from behind, familiar and urgent. “Sir, put that gun *down* if you do not want to see a man bleed out!”

“I don’t listen to you, Sherlock Holmes! Tell your partner to get off my boss, or he’s getting a hole through his head!”

Carlette’s eyes, steely and shot with red, narrowed at Mikotoba. “You have oaths. You take an oath to preserve life, you lunatic–”

“I preserve the life of PATIENTS, Mr. Carlette, and you are NOT my patient!” Mikotoba’s fingers drew tighter around the needle, his knuckles going bone-white. “I owe *nothing* to you, Mr. Samuel Carlette, and I think you will find that you have a far better fate waiting for you at Scotland Yard than with me. So call. Him. *Off!*” The needle shoved up higher, catching the tip of the criminal’s chin.

Mikotoba had never felt such anger in his *life*. He had never felt it scorch his lungs, pull his heart into his ears. The world narrowed to that needle and that open, waiting neck.

I could do it. I could push it in.

He saw a flicker of true, absolute fear in Carlette’s eyes, then a decision.

“Duncan! Put the gun down!”



Scotland Yard arrived soon after, packing both assailants into the back of a wagon. Carlette yelled quite profusely about his rights as he was escorted out, which was swallowed easily by the chatter and movement of the police force around Mikotoba and Holmes. They did their due diligence: answering questions, receiving medical attention, agreeing to follow-up appointments and meetings. All the standard fare for London’s Legendary Pair.

All standard save for one thing.

“Care to explain, my good fellow, what that outburst was in there?”

Mikotoba turned to see Holmes looking cautiously over his shoulder, his hand wrapped in gauze. The man had regained a sufficient amount of colour to his face for the Scotland Yard medics to stop buzzing about him like insects. Now, the two sat stiffly beside one another, the officers attending to other matters and seemingly reluctant to interrupt the pair.

Mikotoba exhaled slowly, steeping his hands in front of him, his back hunched over. “I don’t find that I can readily explain that, Holmes.” He shrugged. “I apologise if I frightened you.”

“F – Frightened?” Holmes said, tilting his head. “No, that was – now, maybe that was one of the words I would use to describe that incident, from the sheer fact that I have never seen you behave in such a manner.” He leaned in, his voice dropping to a conspiratorial whisper. “Was that true? Is that true, of doctors of medicine? That you may forgo your oaths if you are not –”

Mikotoba held up a hand. “No. No, that is not something a doctor may choose to do. One should help, and if they cannot, they should do no harm.” He smoothed a hand down his face, wiping a layer of accumulated sweat across his palm. It hadn’t been until now, he realised, that he had measured his own anxiety, which he had shoved far beneath his heart, so as not to rattle it. He had apparently been close to a nervous breakdown himself, with the sweat and exhaustion he was feeling now.

“Ah. Yes. Completely understandable. Hippocrates the Second would have been utterly furious. Naturally. He would also have been transfixed with the existence of a firearm, but first and foremost you would have been given a great scolding. Yes.” A quick nod of the head from Holmes.

If Mikotoba hadn’t been so distraught himself, the overexaggerated mannerisms would have lighted a kind fire in his stomach. For the time, though, all he could do was stare. Keep reaffirming that Holmes was still there, breathing. Babbling. And for that check-in, the two remained quiet for a minute. Maybe two, until Holmes broke it again, staring someplace past Mikotoba.

“But would you have?” Quiet and soft. “Would you have ever found yourself so enraged that you would have pushed – ?” He looked down at his hands, resting across his legs, and mimed the motion of an object being pushed through skin.

Yuujin Mikotoba thought. It was tempting to dash off the concern at once, placating both his insecurities and Holmes’ doubts. He was a doctor, after all, and a trusted accomplice. Both needed to be aware of how far the other was willing to go in matters of self-defence. It would take a quick dismissal and a reassuring nod to do the trick, and then life could continue as it had. Once Holmes’ hand healed, the two would be investigating again. Actually, Holmes

would likely start pursuing the next caper without any regard for his own health, insisting that he could investigate each crime scene using only the left set of digits. And Mikotoba would smile and shake his head, and the routine would resume once more.

But. That was not entirely fair to Holmes, that quick dismissal. Mikotoba looked at that hunched posture, that flicker of unease across his partner's face. It was strange, in that moment, to see Holmes as only twenty-two. He seemed far older and certainly more world-weary than Mikotoba had been at that age. Lines wore at his forehead and cheeks, and his pupils still looked blown wide, like they had when Carlette had levelled a gun at him.

But they were not merely widened, Mikotoba noted. They flickered back and forth, like Holmes was examining terrain. It was as if he was investigating the scene again, laying out the principal players one by one, reassessing every frame surrounding the confrontation.

This question was not merely for reassurances. This was for future machinations in that grand mind of his. This was insurance. There was no room for pleasantries.

Oh, this poor, great man, Mikotoba thought sadly.

"I didn't – I must tell you, quite honestly, that the thought had never crossed my mind before this day. I was sure I would never have to be at the causal end of a man's suffering." He sighed, wringing his hands in front of him, rubbing his finger at his pulse point. "But... But after I saw that gun, and looked at you there before it, something... something snapped. I felt like there was nothing between me and a – a killer. And it was only in that second that I had the courage to leap forward and... well. It doesn't bear repeating. You saw the rest."

A moment sailed between them, caught on the London smog, choking them in silence.

The quiet question, again. "So you would?"

A nod. "I think I just might. For you, Holmes. And only if you were – if your life were in danger." He lowered his head into his hands. "Does that make me a monster? To think of trading lives like that, when I should preserve them?"

In a microsecond, hardly enough to inhale, Mikotoba felt a hand close around his wrist. His head snapped up, catching Holmes, who looked at him with eyes no longer wide in recollection, but sharp with unflinching clarity.

"Mikotoba, I do not believe in monsters. I believe there are men with values. Carlette valued his empire more than a human life, and you value preservation of life above anything," he said, his voice unwavering in certainty. "I do not say this lightly, so I beg you to listen: There are no monsters, and if there were, I could never see you amongst their ranks. I am humbled and honoured that you would go to such lengths to preserve me, and I would do the same for you in any given circumstance. That is a promise."

Mikotoba's breath stuttered out as he found himself unable to look away. With Holmes' thumb on his wrist, he could feel a jumping pulse hammering in time with his. For a few seconds more, only the two of them existed, each of their expressions stern with promise, yet soft with compassion. Finally, Holmes' hand slid away from his, the touch trailing across the back of Mikotoba's hand. The gaze softened, and Holmes tilted his head in consideration.

"Well! I am glad that that matter is resolved, then. I am relieved and reassured to have a manner of protection afforded to me as your..." He stumbled on the

word, his face suddenly clouded with nervousness. And what word was it? Friend? Fellow investigator? Roommate? Something else – something the two could not name, some incontrovertible tension that hung in the air around them, that dug through Yuujin’s heart whenever he saw the man succeed or fail, laugh or cry, wound or be wounded?

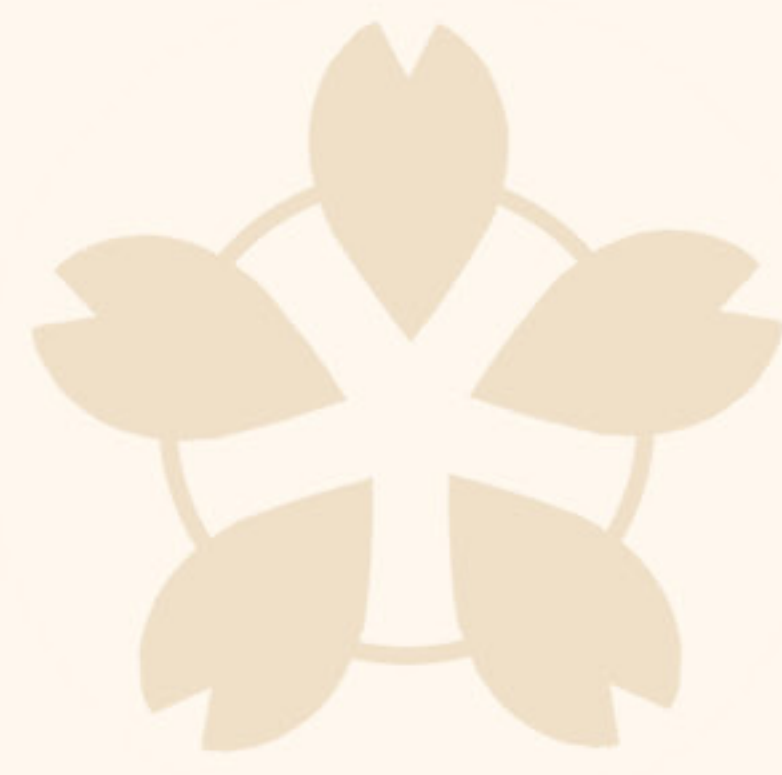
What was it? *Ah, yes.*

“Your partner, Sherlock Holmes,” said Mikotoba.

And the man smiled, the dawn breaking through the clouds. “Yes. My partner.”

And in the eye of the flurry of officers, in a grimy facet of the jewel of Great Britain, two young men stood and walked home. Both bloody. Both smiling. And that was enough.





My Ayame,

There is no moon tonight.

London's skies are foggy, choked with the grey, acrid smoke that permeates every one of my breaths. I've been here for a few weeks now, and my grief is no less heavy for having left Japan.

It makes me wonder... was this worth leaving Susato for?

When I am not thinking of you (I am always, always, thinking of you), I think of her (I am always, always thinking of her).

I think about anger – the anger I feel at losing you, the anger I know Susato will feel years later, at me, at you. The anger you would feel at me for abandoning her, another heavy burden for my conscience to bear.

I think about distance. The distance between you and us, the one we can never breach. The distance between me and her, one that can be mended, if it comes down to it. At least, I hope so.

Hope. I think about hope, and how it feels as far away as the sound of your laughter on the wind.

I am beginning to forget what you sound like. Only a handful of months, and your voice is slipping away into the eddies of my memory. And when it comes to memory... I came to London for a reason, I know. It is getting increasingly difficult to remember what that reason is. Why is it that they never tell you how grief warps the mind out of rationality, how it sinks its cold fingers into memory and pulls everything away?

At least the days are a distraction. In my studies here, I have come to share a flat with a rather curious young fellow. He's a bit of a rascal, Sherlock Holmes, but he is unfailingly kind and generous, and he seems to come from money. He has been instrumental in making me feel – well, not welcome, since every eye on the street is near-always turned towards me with hostility – but more at ease.

Sherlock is also exceptionally brilliant. One might not think so when faced with his brand of absurd antics and leaps in logic, but he has a true aptitude for detective work. I've sometimes consulted with him on a case he is working on with Scotland Yard, though I believe that to him, I serve as a human to throw ideas at rather than someone who provides any real input.

Still, he truly does seem to value my companionship. I am glad for his in turn. Sometimes, late at night, when I cannot sleep, I find him awake as well, his eyes shadowed with his own demons. On those nights, I prepare tea for the both of us, and he fetches his violin. He plays beautifully, as soulfully and passionately as you played the koto. These are nights during which I can find a little more rest.

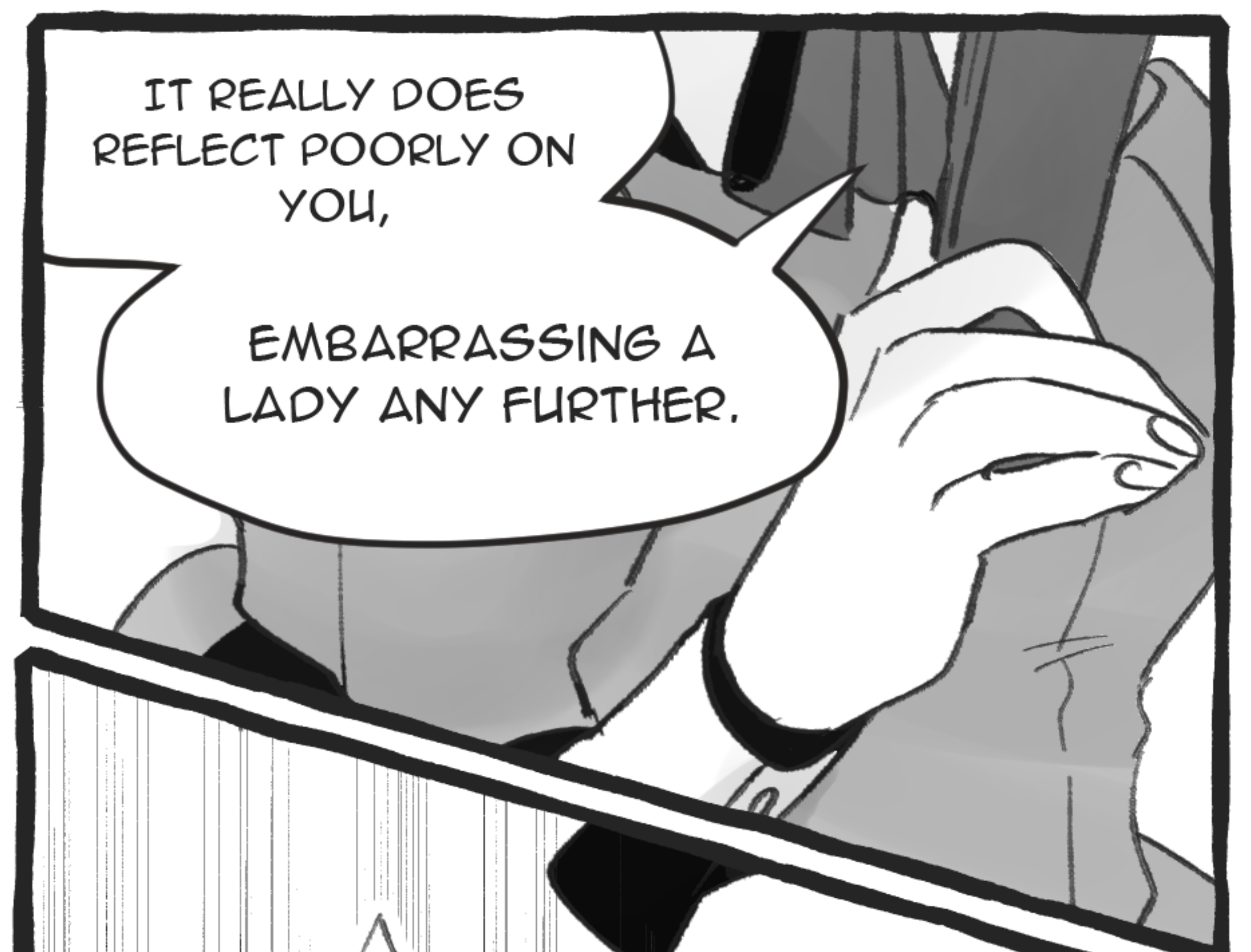
My remaining months in London stretch out far before me, marking the time until I can reunite with Susato and function as a father should. In the meantime, I suppose I have Sherlock to help me weather any storms.

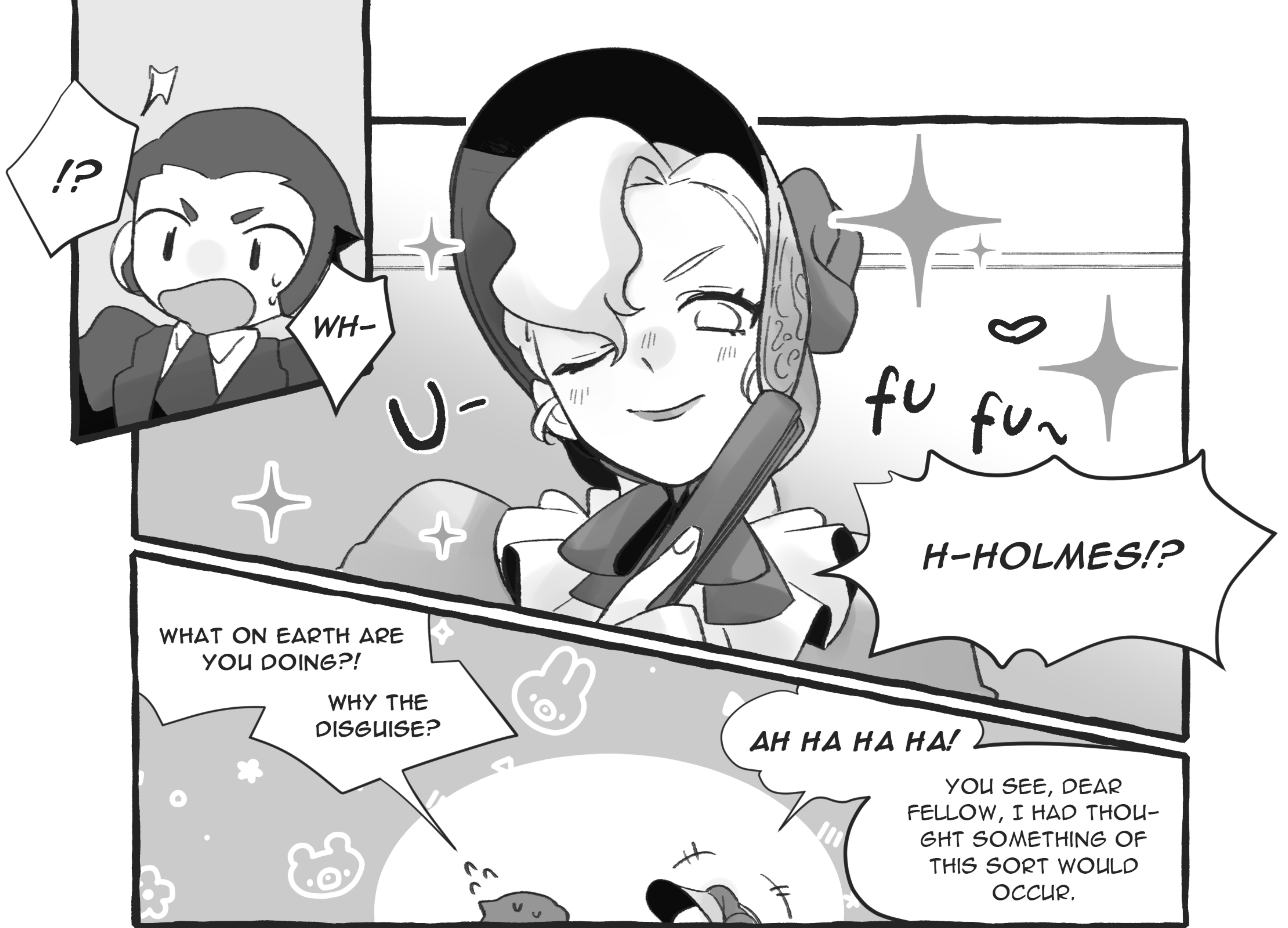
I love you, Ayame. I miss you so much. I will do you proud on my return home.

Yuzi~



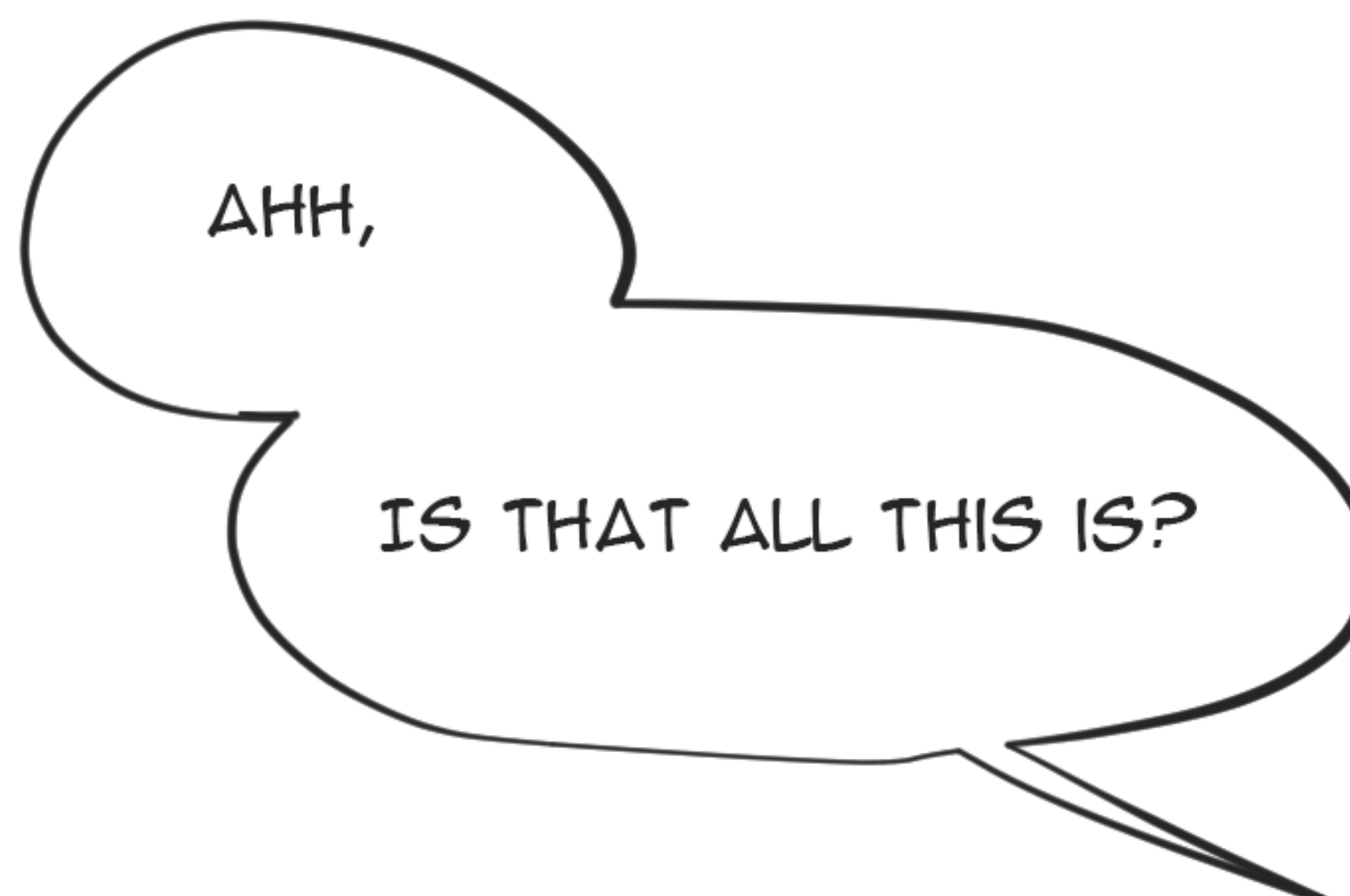






I CAN'T DENY ANY OF THAT...







I HAVE CHOSEN YOU.

I WISH TO DANCE WITH
YOU, SO EVEN IF OTHERS
HAVE SOUGHT MY
ATTENTION...

...WHAT DOES IT EVEN
MATTER?

NOW,

MIKOToba!



THE GAME IS AFOOT!









My dearest Mitotaka,

Written by Ming

It was spring of last year when I first realised.

"The cherry blossoms are magnificent this season," you had said. You stared wistfully outside our window. There were potted petunias lined the windowsill, but their leaves were wilting and they had not yet started to bloom. "I wish I could see them again."

~~And I-~~

I had thought, foolishly, that there must be a botanist at the university I could speak to. They would know where to find cherry blossom trees, proper ones imported from Japan. I could take you to see them under the guise of a case. And if there were any type of flora here, even if they were not the exact same as the ones from your homeland, I could bring them to you, bouquets upon bouquets of cherry blossoms. I would fill our living room up with those flowers, dye the floorboards pink with their petals, make every inch burst with their vibrancy.

Why?

Because you wanted something, and at that moment I would have done anything to see you smile.

Ah, you are shaking your head at how childish my words are. I am not a writer, you understand, and this is not a letter meant to be read.

Unlike our cases where the crystalline truth always shines bright in darkness, realising my affections was one truth I wished had remained buried. Now that I had a name for them, there was nothing pure about my thoughts towards you.



One evening, I had been tinkering with that rapid development camera for crime scenes (you know the one; they really ought to award me for my contributions towards forensics), when I glanced across the room and saw you deep in concentration at the writing table. You had the cap of your pen between your teeth, a flash of white molar, and you were frowning down at the document in your hands. You have always been a hard worker, whether your hands held a scalpel or a medical article, and it is always a privilege to watch you work regardless if I sometimes... do not always show it.

It was a warm and muggy day, even as the sun set, and your sleeves had been rolled up to your elbows. Your tan skin was exposed to the air and to my eyes, bright against the dark wood of your desk. There was the jut of your wrist bone, and there were the firm muscles of your arm, brazen and bold.

I flushed then. Frozen in my seat, horrified at myself, I was as red as anything just from the sight of you. I have a fair complexion, and it is not difficult to see me flush in anger or aggravation as much as I hate to admit it, but that was my first time in attraction. I snuck a photo, my heart rattling behind my ribs like coins in a beggar's hat, before I came to my senses. Then I rushed back to my room in terror, knocking over a test tube in my haste.

The rest of the evening I was too loud, my voice ringing out with a false bravado that was too obvious, and I must've stared at every inch of our living room except for your face. I prayed that you had not noticed.

Do you know? I still cannot look at that photo without becoming red. If you are reading this, I can see you tensing, pulling away. I tried, my dear friend, you must know I tried to temper these strange new emotions that were neither welcomed nor familiar. It was not right to look at you that way, to dirty and besmirch something as innocent as you working on an autopsy report. This will pass, I told myself, as the seasons do. A new puzzle will come that will capture my ever tumultuous mind, and we will have no more of this tomfoolery.

Then you gave me the gift.

It was autumn. I knew that because the wood of the pipe was the same mahogany burnish as the leaves outside. What a fanciful, nonsensical observation. My good man, this is what you have reduced my mind to - waxing poetry over the colour of leaves instead of anything substantial. What next? Marvelling at clouds and bird songs instead of the corpse at my feet and the yellowing of their eyes?

Mikotoba, do you know the significance of autumn? Aha! How astute of someone I call my partner. That is correct, there is no significance. It was not my birthday (you had presented me with a rather stylish cap for that occasion), and it was not near Christmas either (a sturdy and fetching magnifying glass was your present then). There was, frankly, no rhyme or reason why you ought to have given me anything at all. I certainly had done you no favours as a roommate, prodding you awake with glee at odd hours in the night to chase after leads. And yet you said, "I had noticed your old one was worn down and I... well..." You were bashful when you presented it to me. The pipe had a red ribbon around stem, and the thought of you tying it there, fixing the dainty little bow, thinking of me,

~~Why did I think writing things down would help?~~

Carved onto the stem were my initials, that final nail to the coffin.

"I hope you like it."

I love it. ~~I love~~

It is cruel of me to not be content with what we had. You spent your days and your nights with me. We would dine together, cutlery clinking on china, and you would say something and I would laugh and I would say something and you would laugh back. We danced together one night while drunk, our feet shuffling across the wooden floorboards, hips bumping against the corners of furniture, your hand warm in mine, your eyes warm on mine. When the dance ended and you smiled up at me, sweat dripping down your brow, your carefully slicked back hair dishevelled just so, that single shining moment should have been enough. Oh, Lord, it should have been enough.

If I take my lies with whiskey, will it go down easier, you think?

In January I took the second photo of you. Or was it perhaps February? I never had the same head for dates as you, my Boswell, know well. It was freezing that day, I remember that much, the kind of cold that made me wish I was curled in front of our fireplace, plucking at violin strings. I had been speaking with Inspector Gregson at the station - there were a few pieces of evidence he had wanted me to examine, and he had the grace to at least pay for my cab fare, however I found the entire thing trite and cumbersome, and I left in a rather foul mood. A dry snow was falling outside, clinging onto clothing and exposed skin, chilling what the winds did not already chill.



There, at the end of the street, was you. There was a scarf around your neck, your breath plumbing out in front of you, and although you were wearing your thick, black coat, hands tucked into the pockets for warmth, you still shivered every now and then. You stood in the corner, pressed close to the windows of Wilkerson's & Sons, nodding politely at those who passed you by, trying to blend in with the background.

You had a habit of doing that, my world class observations showed me. Turning into yourself, making yourself smaller, taking up as little room as possible. I don't blame you. I've heard the things my countrymen say to your face, and the things they say when they think you are not listening. The thought hollows me out, and yet I know it would not be a fraction of what you face.

Then your eyes caught mine. Mikotoba, if you could have seen your expression. The way your eyes lit up, the way you stood taller, the way you smiled and kept smiling. I had taken the camera with me in case Gregson had anything of interest for me to record (how dull, he did not), and I took that picture of you then because if I did not have it in physical form I could not trust myself to not forget. To not think it was conjured by my tortured mind, drowning in longing.

Clients will thank me before leaving, on the good cases. The police consider me an eyesore. Even my own family, I daresay we send the obligatory letters and no more than that. But you waited for me - you, my good man, had been there for half an hour judging by the snow on your clothes and along the brim of your hat, and the red of your nose - with such patience, and then you smiled at me. You saw me, through the smog and filth of London, out of everyone in the rotten city, you saw me. And it is still not enough.

I do not wish for you to look at me. I wish for you to look only at me.

There is a part of me that worries even if you were to hold me and kiss me like I dreamed of, what then? What if the hunger still does not fade? Will I devour you like the creatures of old, from head to fingers to toes, chewing through sinews and bones and arteries? And if I am still ravenous afterward for more than you can give, with this hunger that has neither house nor home, how terrible it would become with nothing left to feast on. There is so little separating me, I realised, from the criminals I help put away.

Your affection for me is nothing less than sea water. I drink and I drink and it fills me but my thirst is never slaked, never sated.

The extent of these feelings frighten me. I cannot imagine it would not frighten you more. My brother Mycroft had said, once, "How I wish you would find a love more than your love for your seven percent solution," and now I realised it was a curse. Love is cruel. It is merciless and destructive and all consuming like a forest fire, and I wish I did not feel it. Because even now, I cannot help but hope. You, who have always seen the world for more than its shadows, I hope, twisting inside of me like the knots on a noose, that you could look at me as I am with all my flaws and ugliness, and accept that as well.

You are a good man, my dear Mikotoba, but I think there are limits to even your kindness. So I took the last photo of you as a memento.

I had said something (what was it? I have wracked my mind for weeks trying to remember to no avail, but it involved a goose and an orange, that I was certain of), and it amused you. You tipped your head back and laughed, and the sound of your laughter, that was the sweetest sound I have ever heard. I preened. I did that for you. I made you laugh, intentionally, and brought that honey sweet sound into our living room, and so I took a picture, before you could protest, because there are precious few things in life I never wish to forget.

Neither of us are naive enough to believe you will stay in London forever, but when the anchors pull up and the ship pulls away, this is what I wish to keep with me as a reminder that you were here and I was something good in your life.

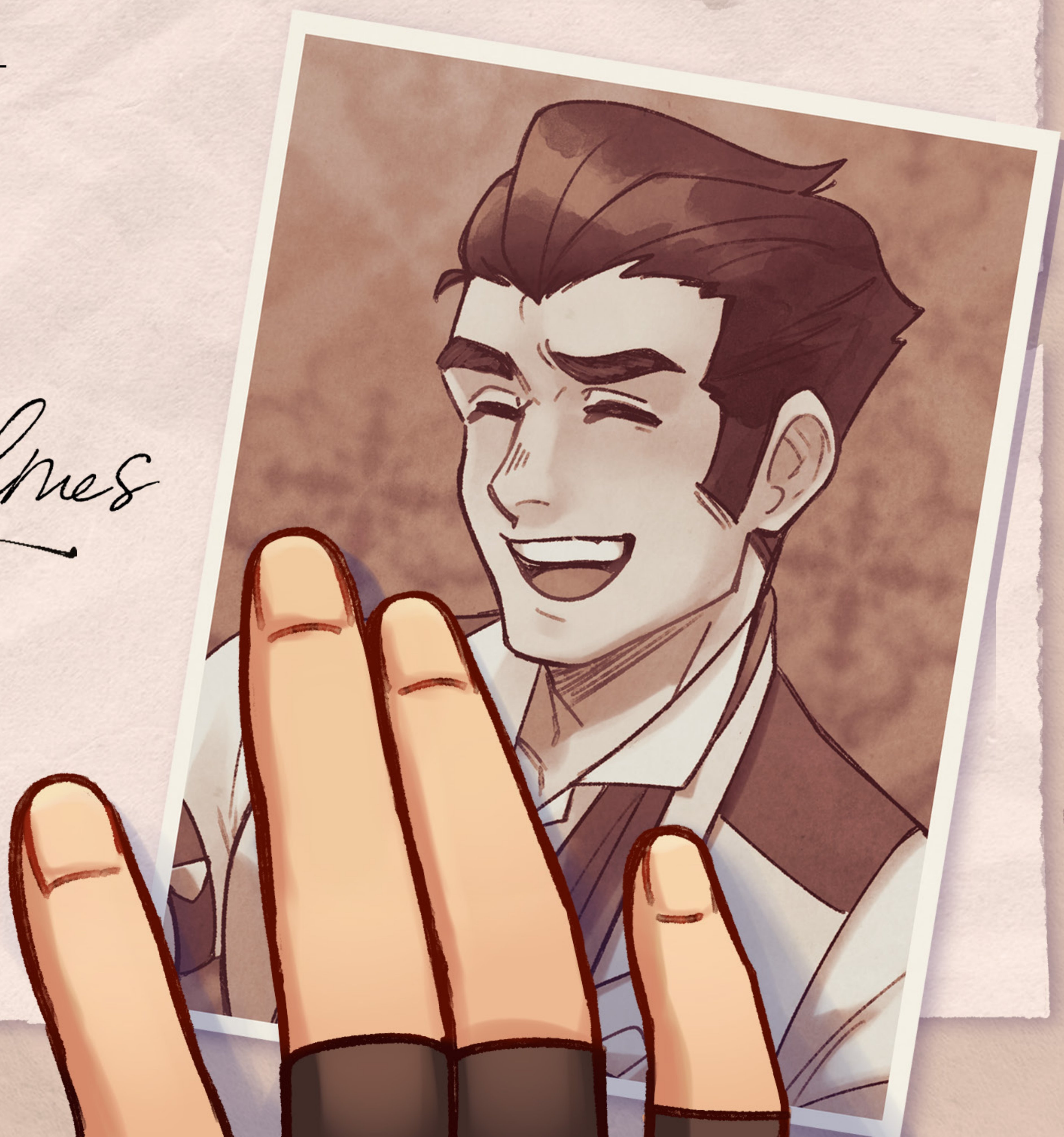
What more can I say? I hoard these pictures of you and I cling to the moments that we share and I let myself dream of a life together I know we cannot have. I pretend that it is enough. My dear, dearest friend.

Know I am charmed and besotted, seduced and delighted. I am, for the better or the worse (although we both know, I think, where the needle falls on that one), completely, utterly, hopelessly, in love with you.

And I remain, for as long as you will have me -

Yours,

Sherlock Holmes











HAVEN'T
YOU HAD
A BIT
TOO MUCH,
HOLMES?

YOU'LL
FALL...

IT'S
FINE,
IT'S
FINE...

YOU'RE
NOT MAKING
YOURSELF A
GOOD EXAM-
PLE FOR IRIS...

YOU WORRY
TOO MUCH, MY
DEAR MIKOTO-
BA.

YOU
SEE, I'M
PERFECTLY FI-

WAH...!





LOOK
WHAT
YOU...

SERIOUSLY,
HOLMES!

...

AH HA
HA
HA
HA!!



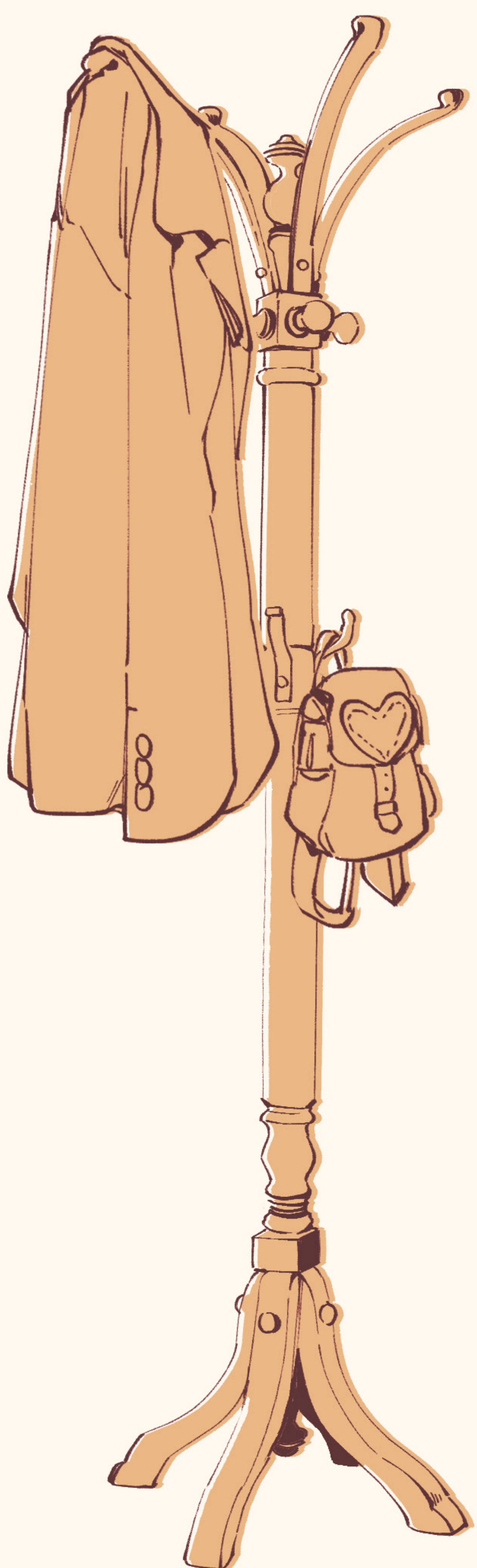
...

...YOU'RE
BLUSHING.

I BET
IT'S JUST
THE ALCO-
HOL.











My dear Holmes,

I must apologise for the tardiness in my response. Things have been even more hectic than I expected back home, and I've hardly had the time to sit down and write, much less in this language. As I pen these words, I realise just how much I have missed it.

My return to this country has been complicated, as I'm sure you can imagine. The first time I set eyes upon my dear Susato, I was filled with immense joy. She has grown so much these past six years. She was such a quiet little thing when I last saw her, barely capable of opening her eyes and seeing the world around her (very far from observing, my dear friend, as you may imagine), and now she has grown into the cleverest little lady I have ever met.

And through no merit of my own.

She won't call me "father." My mother chastises her for it, but I let her be. If she can't see me as her father, I have only myself to blame for it. You know, my dear friend, how often I have been burdened by my shame and regret during the six years of our intimacy, but I have never felt them as keenly as I do now, faced with the consequences of my actions. It is as if I am now being forced to pay the toll for the immense happiness I experienced next to you. I can only hope to apply myself and become the father that she truly deserves, and perhaps one day she will recognise me as such.

I'm sorry. I made you wait so long for this letter, and yet all I can do is burden you with my grievances.

Onto happier news. I was offered a teaching position at Imperial Yumei University upon my arrival, where I will be able to begin conducting my own research. Can you believe it? I will finally be able to put my knowledge to good use, after having learned from the greatest masters.

Don't smile to yourself like that. I was talking about Dr. Watson.

I'm pleased to know that Iris is doing well, and I greatly enjoyed your little anecdote. Indeed, what a pair the two of you must make. I only wish I had been there to see it. I am also glad to hear that you've kept yourself occupied. You've grown so much from the day I met you, Holmes, even if you don't realise it yourself. I'm proud of you.

I must apologise once more for my late response. I eagerly await your next letter. Please, do keep me up to date on Iris's progress. Remember to always check her food's temperature before feeding her, and don't leave any toys in her crib while she sleeps.

Your friend,
Yuuji ~ Mikoto

𐄂 𐄂𐄂𐄂𐄂 𐄂𐄂𐄂𐄂𐄂 𐄂𐄂𐄂𐄂 𐄂𐄂𐄂𐄂𐄂𐄂 𐄂𐄂𐄂𐄂𐄂𐄂 𐄂𐄂𐄂𐄂𐄂𐄂 𐄂𐄂𐄂𐄂𐄂𐄂

November, 18

Thursday,
14th

Today was the first day that Susato did not hide behind her grandmother when I greeted her in the morning.

My manner was never as welcoming as Ayame's. It seems that is true with children, as well.

I don't think Susato yet understands the implications of my having left her behind with her grandmother. I wouldn't go so far as to assume that she resents me. No, I think it's something much more mundane – suddenly there is a strange man in the house, one whom she has never met, and she is meant to treat him like a beloved family member. In her position, I would be confused as well.

So it has been slow going. Generally by the time breakfast has concluded, she is willing to respond to my questions, if not necessarily strike up a conversation of her own. Ayame's mother tells me to be patient, and I have been – it is, after all, my fault that the situation is what it is.

But nevertheless, I admit it hurts to be shunned by one's daughter. More than once, I have smiled at a story of hers, only to be met with a frown or, even worse, tears.

...I recall a moment in the scant few days before I left with Seishirou back to Japan. Despite his initial worries, Holmes took to parenting like a duck to water. I admit, it was slightly to my surprise as well. Not that I didn't trust him to raise Iris; if I had, I would never have left her with him. No, it was more that – he is young, and scatterbrained, and I have frequently seen him forget to eat for hours upon end when he gets himself absorbed in one experiment or another.

But how wrong I was proven, and how quickly.

It was only the fourth, or perhaps the fifth, morning when I awoke to a rather fearsome silence. Quiet mornings were a longtime feature of our home, to be sure – Holmes is not one for rousing before noon, if he can at all avoid it – but infants are hardly known for their regular sleep schedules. So when I awoke to the sun slanting directly into my eyes, I feared the worst.

As soon as I stumbled into the main room, however, my fears were proven pointless, though I admit it took a moment or two before I could understand what I was seeing.

Holmes was always one for inventing something if he could not find it commercially – or rather, I suspect, he would especially invent something if it could be obtained commercially, but with less pzazz than he liked.

And so, leave it to him to create something simultaneously practical and ridiculous.

The base of the creation was simple enough: a few lengths of cotton and leather, sewn together to form a harness of sorts. Iris' chubby little limbs were threaded inexpertly through the holes he'd crafted, leaving her pulled snug against his chest, head supported by a soft fleece hood.

All rather sensical, if a little idiosyncratic. But of course Holmes could not stop there. He'd found a flexible strand of wood from somewhere (the neighbours' tomato trellises, I assume, though at the time I decided against starting an argument I was not even sure I wanted to win) and had affixed, to the end, a small tuft of feathers. The whole affair dangled in front of Iris' face, and though she was still far too young to make an attempt to grab it, she did look somewhat fascinated. It was rather reminiscent of the sort of mobile one would put into a baby's bassinet. I suppose I need not point out that one does not typically wear a mobile, however.

"Holmes," I could not help but ask, and he froze as if caught in the middle of committing some crime, "is that my feather duster?"

He had refused to answer, though really, the truth of the matter was evident to the both of us.

I'm catching myself smiling as I write this. He always did have a way of cheering me up through the most innocuous of methods. Not all of them were intentional, of course. And he never took any particular pleasure in being the butt of a joke, no matter how he may have set himself up for it.

But even so. Smiles were in short order when I first arrived in Britain, and I think he knew, even before I told him the cause. So he grumbles as I laugh, but I don't ultimately think he begrudges me.

Begrudges, I say. Present tense. Not the first time I have made this mistake, and I know it won't be the last. It's morbid, maybe, to use past tense when speaking of someone who is still alive – and doubtless my mother-in-law would not approve, being superstitious the way she is – but it's hard not to feel as though I should, when I remember that we are now an ocean apart, and comfort is no longer so simple as just looking across the room or reaching across a table.

He took so easily to fatherhood. And I don't resent him for it; Iris deserves only the best, after such a rough start to life. It's more akin to... jealousy, perhaps. Jealousy that, even eight years my junior, Holmes took to a task that I'm still struggling with today. ~~And I wonder sometimes if he even~~

No. I was going to write something tremendously unfair. And this just after I claimed to not be resentful.

Well, maybe it isn't resentment so much as defensiveness. After all, when I lay the sterile facts out on paper, they do me no favours: I swept into his life, all but dropped an infant into his lap, and then departed again for my own country. It's perhaps logical, if not flattering, that I'd feel this way. An ugly sentiment, and not one that I feel proud to admit, but – if the purpose of a journal is to introspect, then, well. Introspect I will.

And, again, it always comes back to the fact that he flourished. Immediately. Unapologetically.

I think, ultimately, the root of all my turmoil is longing. Something so deep-rooted I can't even begin to will it away. He is now a single parent, as am I, and babies were always meant to be raised in full, loving families. It is a waste that we are separated when it's so clear that we would be stronger together. As partners. As we always were meant to be.

They say that it is foolish to regret things that can't be changed, and I understand the sentiment; why spend energy on that, instead of things that can be improved upon? Why spend an evening moping in one's bedroom, when one's long-neglected daughter is playing, alone, just down the hall?

Holmes, surely, is not wasting time thus. Knowing him, he's been out and about on the daily since I've departed, no doubt bringing his daughter along with him. She will be raised on mysteries and Holmes' own brand of ad-lib science, and if I know Holmes (and, despite any of my other failings which I have enumerated at length, I feel quite confident that I do), she will be a fully-fledged member of their household detective agency before she is even an adolescent.

Yes, I am quite confident that they are doing just fine, and if I had half of his tenacity, I would be following his lead.

But he is there. And I am here. ~~I think I~~

~~I wish that~~

He is a better man than even I knew.

Holmes, I'm sorry.



My dear Holmes,

Thank you for sending the latest instalment of the Strand once again. As usual, Susato tore it from my hands the moment it arrived, and she spent no less than five days poring over it before finally letting me have a look at it. I can't blame her for her excitement; it was quite the thrilling adventure. The good doctor outdid herself this time. I wish I could congratulate her in person for a job well done.

It makes me happy to see Susato so eagerly enjoy the tales of our old adventures, though I must admit, it can be very difficult to stop myself from correcting the myriad inaccuracies in them and recounting the cases as they truly happened instead.

On a very selfish level, I wish I could reveal the whole truth to her. As shameful as it is to admit this, I can't help but feel like she would come to appreciate me more if she knew I was her beloved Great Detective's partner. Our relationship has improved greatly in recent years, as you know, yet I can't help but wish I was more of a role model for her.

Ah, don't make that face, my dear Holmes. I promise I'm in far less of a morose mood than these words may imply.

I must also say that the creativity that your little biographer employs in writing her stories has its own merits. Reading them not only helps me relive our old adventures, but it also makes me feel as if I'm experiencing entirely new ones. It truly feels as if I'm being transported into the past and future all at once, and it seems, my dear friend, that you remain the one constant in both cases.

There's something else about reading these stories that makes me immensely happy. Perhaps I shouldn't put the feeling into words, not when I don't know if this wish of mine can ever become true, but even though we're so far apart, sharing Iris's stories of our old adventures with Susato...

Well, it makes me feel as if the four of us were together.

I know it is a childish notion, but I do hope that, one day, it could become a reality. Can you imagine? The four of us, sitting together, perhaps after a hearty meal, in a place we can all call home. I can picture it so easily. Can you picture it too, old friend?

I look forward to the next instalment of The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes. What adventures, old and new, lie in wait for us, I wonder?

Your friend,
Yuz ~ Mikoto





My dear Mikotoba,

My response to your previous letter is already en route to Japan, but recent circumstances have forced me to write to you again. A few short days ago, Iris showed me the manuscript of her latest story. She was incredibly proud of it, calling it her best work yet. I felt some worry when I read the title, as you can imagine, but I knew that your notes on that particular case were purposefully vague, and so I never saw it necessary to hide them from her. I never imagined that she could glean the truth from such a paltry amount of information.

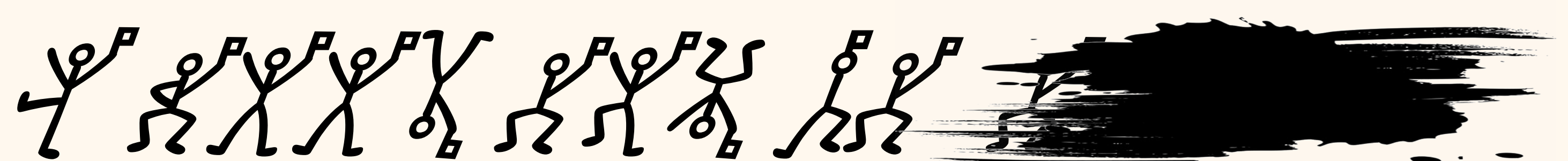
Unfortunately, it seems like I made a grave mistake in not doing so. There are, of course, some inaccuracies, but the core details of her story are frighteningly accurate. I implore that you read the manuscript and see it for yourself.

I immediately forbade her from publishing it and ordered that she turn it over to me. I also secured your original notes in order to prevent her from looking at them and potentially gleaning even more than she already has. She looked terribly disheartened, and I can't help but wonder if I've done the right thing. I only want to protect her from her past and to uphold the promise I made to you, but I can only wonder if I'm not making things worse.

I'm lost, Mikotoba. I don't know what to do. Ever since she showed me that manuscript there has been but a single thought in my mind: if only you were here! I'm sure you would know how to best proceed. I fancied myself your master on all matters, yet now I feel lost without your guidance.

Please respond as soon as you are able.

Yours
Sherlock Holmes





And the dog?"

Has been in the habit of carrying the dog has held it tightly by the collar. The dog's jaw, as seen in the illustration, is a common feature for a terrier and, by Jove, it is a cuter dog than I have ever seen and paced the ground. There was such a

on our very doors. He is a prince. Now is the time to stay in the house. That is the only way to

of p... and, ... e. "I ... e t ...

the hand of







**FOR GOD'S SAKE HOLMES,
THIS IS NOT THE TIME!**

**RELAX MIKOToba!
I'M ABOUT TO FIND A CLUE!**



NOW THEN...

WE MANAGED TO TURN HIM
OVER TO THE YARD.



INDEED.



LET US LEAVE THE REST TO
OUR YOUNG JAPANESE
FRIENDS.

.....

HOLMES,

FOR SO LONG YOU HAD
TO KEEP SO MANY THINGS
A SECRET.





THE DARKNESS HERE IN LONDON,

THE EXISTENCE OF THE REAPER,

THAT YOUNG GIRL,

THAT FAMILY,

EVERYTHING WAS ON YOUR SHOULDERS ALONE, AND NOW TEN YEARS HAVE GONE AND PASSED BY ALREADY.

HOLMES...



I APOLOGI-

MIKOTOBA!

YOU KNOW, MY LOGIC WAS COMPLETELY INEFFECTIVE ON IRIS!

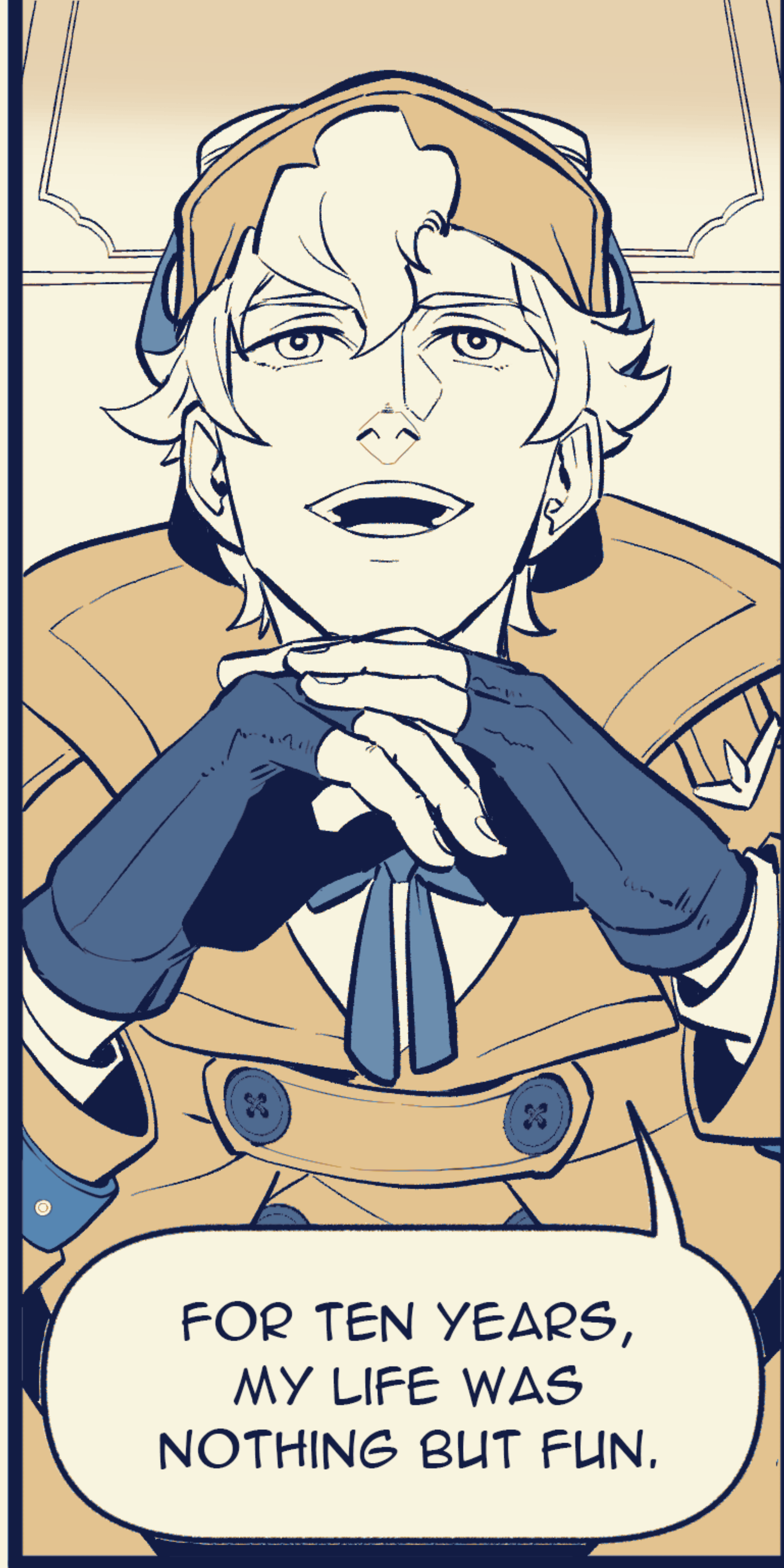


SHE WOULD CRY NO MATTER WHAT I DID, BUT THEN WHEN I WASN'T TRYING ANYTHING, SHE'D SMILE!

GOOD LORD! THERE HASN'T BEEN A SPARE SECOND IN THE PAST TEN YEARS FOR BOREDOM OR TEARS.

CHILDREN ARE THE MOST PROFOUND MYSTERY IN THIS WORLD. I STILL HAVEN'T BEEN ABLE TO FIGURE THEM OUT.

WHY ARE YOU STARING SO BLANKLY AT ME, MIKOTOBA?

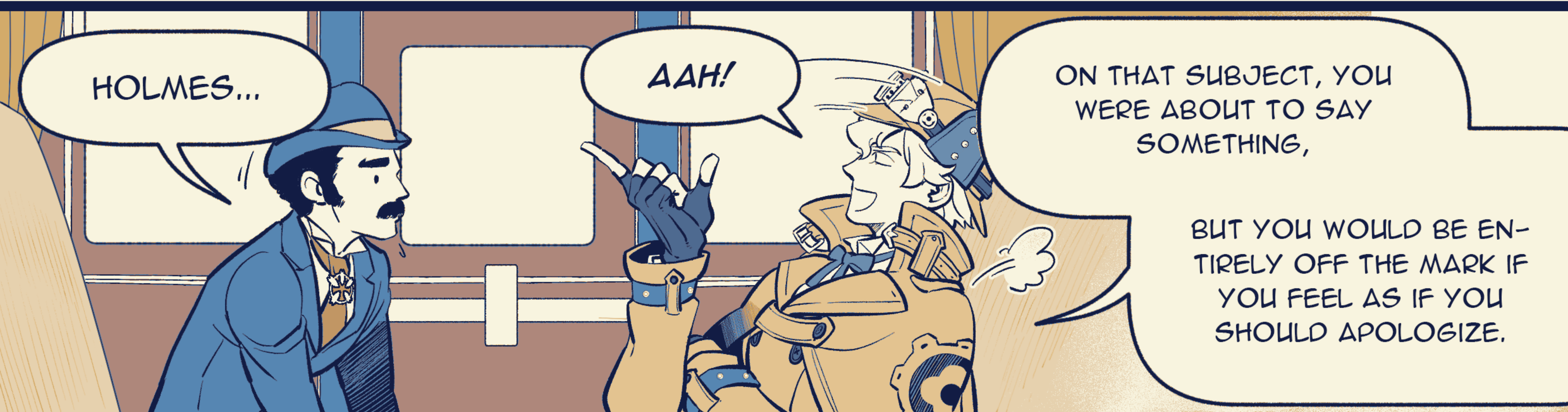


FOR TEN YEARS,
MY LIFE WAS
NOTHING BUT FUN.



YOU HAD ENTRUSTED THE
WORLD'S MOST BELOVED
MYSTERY TO ME...

ALL OF THIS IS
THANKS TO YOU,
MIKOTOBA.



HOLMES...

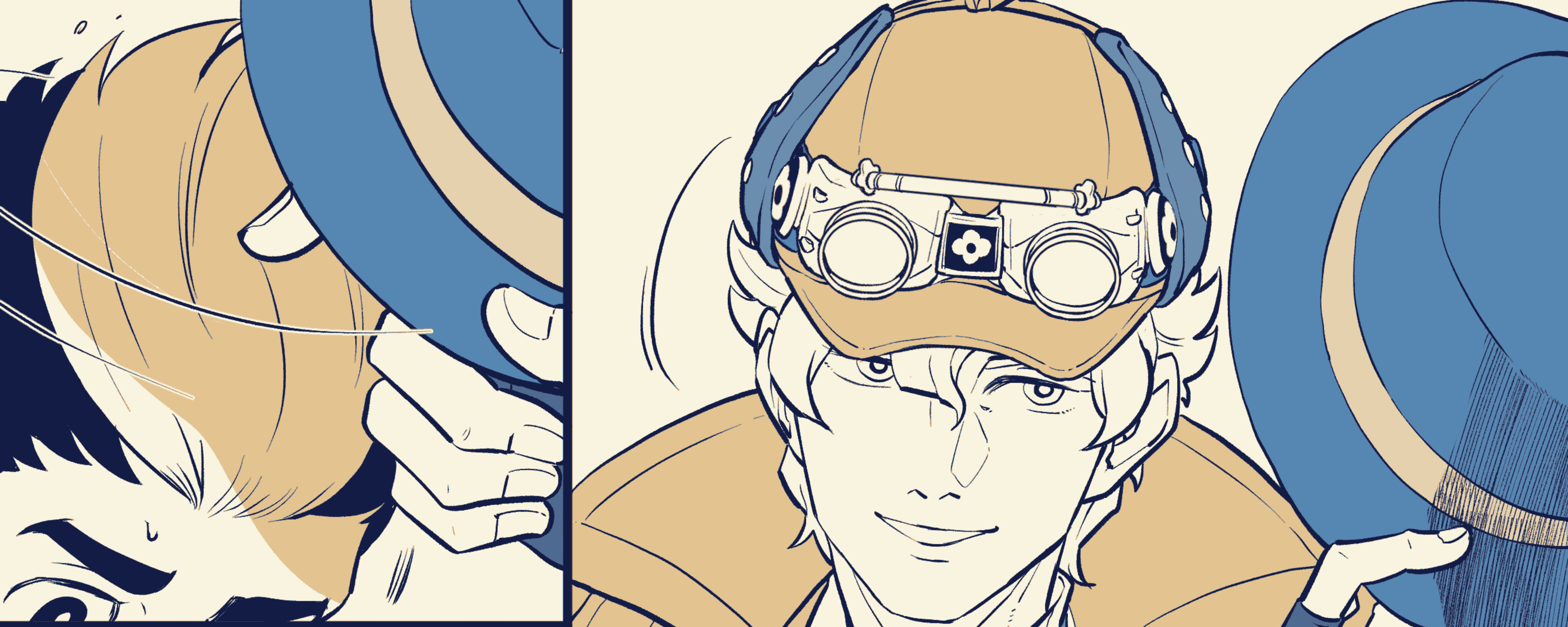
AAH!

ON THAT SUBJECT, YOU
WERE ABOUT TO SAY
SOMETHING,

BUT YOU WOULD BE EN-
TIRELY OFF THE MARK IF
YOU FEEL AS IF YOU
SHOULD APOLOGIZE.



IF THERE IS ANYTHING
YOU SHOULD SAY TO
ME,



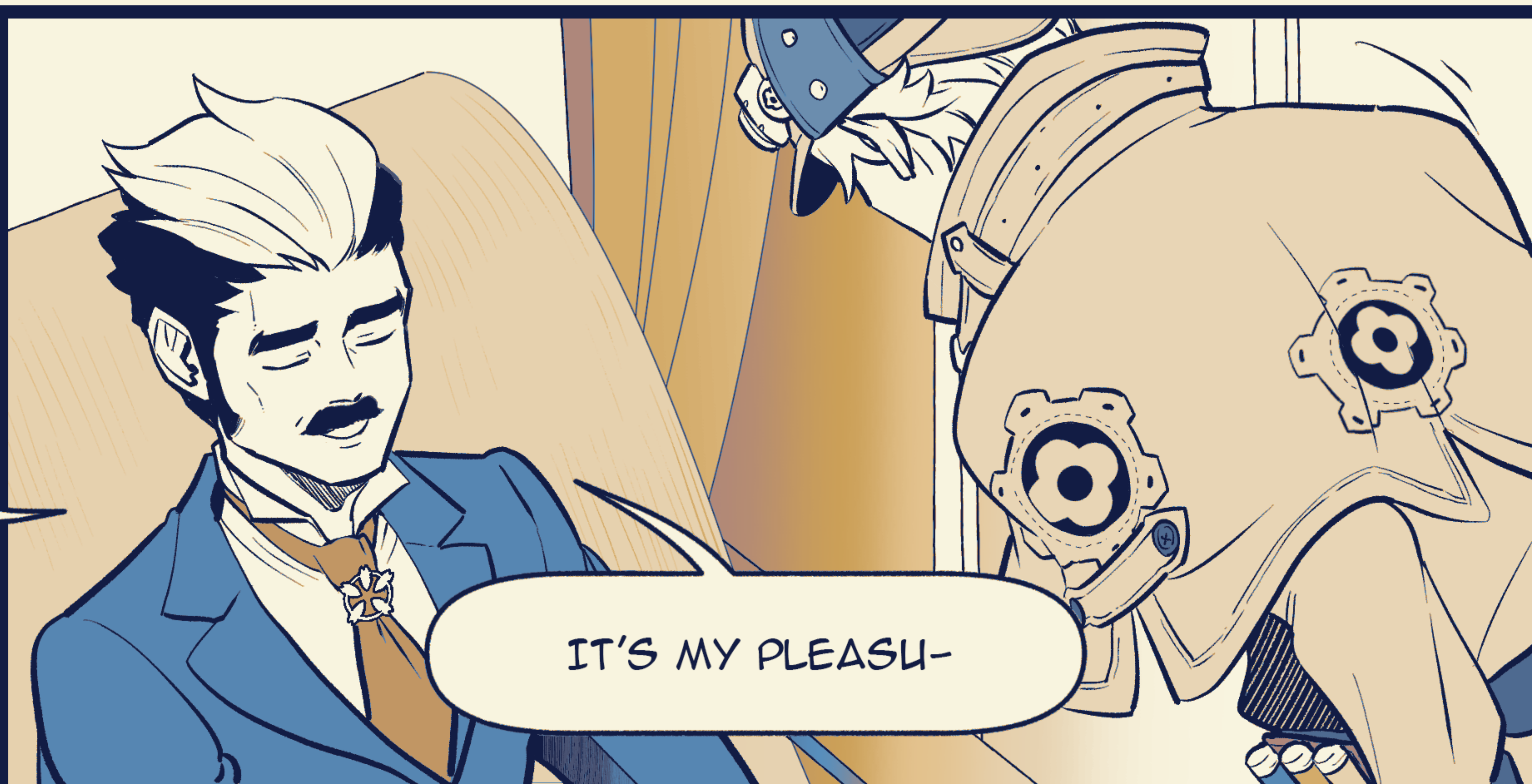
YOU SHOULD SAY, "IT'S MY PLEASURE," IN RESPONSE TO MY WORDS.

"THANK YOU," MIKOTOBA.



GOOD GRIEF...

NO ONE CAN WIN AGAINST YOU, HOLMES.



IT'S MY PLEASU-



YOUR MOUSTACHE
IS IN THE WAY.

...HOL-



THAT WAS A
TOKEN OF MY
GRATITUDE!

FORGIVE ME,



HOWEVER,

TODAY'S BRIEF
JOURNEY HERE
TOGETHER WITH
YOU

HAS BEEN THE MOST FUN
ADVENTURE I HAVE HAD
IN THE PAST TEN YEARS.

...NATURALLY THE
SAME GOES FOR ME.



*I LOVE YOU, MY
DEAR PARTNER!*

*IT'S MY
PLEASURE.*





Wednesday, November 6th

What a tedious thing, to go through the ordeal of transplanting one's thoughts onto paper. As if memory isn't a fickle enough thing when it isn't forced through the stifling filter of the printed word. I've no idea how Iris manages; in fact, I half wonder if this task she's given me is some sort of attempt to cause me to better appreciate her efforts. Well, I'm nothing if not willing to experiment, and though a great detective penning his own adventure is entirely unbecoming, it will certainly be a treat for Iris' readers should my attempt prove successful.

As brilliant as I may be, my talents are not inclined towards poetry, and as such I will allow my hands to carry the burden of telling the tale. Whatever flickering thought passes will find its way onto the page, and in this sense I will proceed. Whatever bit of editing may be necessary following the story's completion will be done before passing to Iris' hands should the experiment prove successful. Review will already be necessary for preserving the identity of my companion – that is, the typical narrator of those tales Iris attempts to retell, of whose true name she as yet remains ignorant. The fellow left only minimal notes on this particular case – unsurprising considering his condition – and I presume it is that which has captured Iris' attention and led her to come to me. I will indulge her, if only in an attempt to see which details I am able to remember and capture in writing.

She is fortunate this case, among all that I have taken and solved, holds a more prominent position in my mind than some others. Details often escape me, holding no value after a case's conclusion, and it isn't often I remember much at all. Only the unique nature of these events spares them from being tossed out in the same manner. I recount them now, though I will confess that many of the specifics are parsed together from what notes Mikotoba was able to create.

The incident occurred in Sussex; it is a beautiful location I hold in high regard despite this black mark upon its record. A gentleman was seen running away from the sea, apparently in some sort of hysterics, and shortly thereafter died in agony. His body was riddled with horrific abrasions, and as he perished miserably he forced through gritted teeth only a single, entirely unintelligible statement about a lion of all things. One could only presume that, having been overcome by delirium, the fellow's mind played tricks on him and caused him to mutter nonsense. That is, in the wake of torture and confusion, he was "lion" about his own cause of death. Hah! Ah, but puns translate poorly on paper.

It was to the sea that our journey then took Mikotoba and myself. We aimed to ascertain the killer, as well as the cause of death. I took to the former task, Mikotoba the latter as a result of his medical expertise – there is no one I would have trusted more with the task, admittedly including myself. Thus, we initially separated upon arrival, myself to investigate the victim's living arrangements and personal connections, Mikotoba the body and crime scene. Separate as the wheels



of a bicycle, yet turning in perfect rhythm – such was the nature of our investigation, and it did not occur to me for even a moment to doubt his capability, nor worry that anything may occur in my absence. Curse my hindered foresight! My thoughts did stray to him and away from their intended path on occasion, but I attributed it at the time to being unaccustomed to loneliness. The company of the players in the case, after all, were no comparison to that of my dear companion. Curse all who lacked the courtesy of being Yuujin Mikotoba!

But time passed, as it tends to against anyone's will, and the setting of the sun soon drew each of our investigations to a close. Having made my way down the path towards town, I found Mikotoba by the sea. He sat upon the shore, holding his chin while watching the waves, apparently enthralled in contemplation. Naturally, it was I who should have occupied his attention at the moment, and so in a moment of great inspiration I took my place at his side and began to decorate his clothes with pinches of sand.

The attempt was successful, and I was shortly no longer ignored.

We exchanged our findings, which were sorely disappointing, and it was in fact only Mikotoba that mitigated my frustrations even by a small amount. Had he discovered anything worthwhile, himself, I might actually have been satisfied enough to thank him.

"I tell you, Mikotoba, it is all perplexing. How does a man die so violently with so little motive and without anyone noticing? In his bathing clothes, no less," I exclaimed, to which he nodded placatingly, apparently undisturbed by the wild movements of my hands. "I daresay he was talented at dying! That, or the killer was talented at killing – or the people here lack talent at noticing. The single man who appears to have any kind of motive or opportunity also claims to have an alibi, though I have yet to confirm it – perhaps it is simpler than it all appears and I've already found the culprit. Yes, yes – perhaps in regards to his alibi, he is merely 'lion!'"

Yes, I recall now that my wordplay was far more effective when spoken aloud. Though it sounded suspiciously like a sigh, dear Mikotoba had laughed, rewarding me with the sight of a small but brilliant smile. How I stared! I recall thinking how unfair it was for him to distract me in such a manner, with that smile of his that somehow showed more in eyes than lips –

In fact, I nearly missed when he began recounting his own findings to me, distracted as I was. The smile melted away as he looked back towards the sea into that same thoughtful look caused a strange sort of jealousy to rise in me that did little more for my attention. How fortunate, then, that he had only found more questions, having been unable to identify so much as a potential murder weapon.

"It's as if he were attacked by the very air, or the sea itself..." he mused, then looked back to me. "But of course, that's impossible. Besides, the breeze feels gentle enough, does it not? And the



waves speak nothing of consequence.”

What reason had I to listen to the waves? I was listening to him! I, after all, was doing my companion the courtesy of giving him the full extent of my attention, not that I was given much choice in the matter. Talk of the breeze only drew my attention to the manner in which it tousled his hair, and for a moment I’ll confess having been jealous of the wind.

“You’re the only one who ever seems to,” I muttered as my mood did its best to sour despite the peace of the moment. I recall the feeling of his eyes upon me as I looked away, perhaps surprised at so frank of an admission. “Would that we were here on vacation rather than business. To share the sounds of the sea together...”

Suddenly aware of what I’d been saying, as well as my companion’s both intrigued and boggled expression, I clicked my mouth shut and ignored my reddening face. “Well. You’re typically the only one who ever speaks anything of consequence, and yet you haven’t. You haven’t found anything at all. Do better, Mikotoba.”

With that, I raced to my feet and fled.

To this day, I wonder what might have happened had I stayed. Most certainly I would have said more than I’d intended, perhaps to an even more foolish degree, but that would have been worth it. All worth it, every bit, had it duly prevented what next occurred.

To this day, though I can’t recall the original victim’s name, I’m unable to forget the sound of the cries ringing from the direction of the beach only hours after I’d taken my leave.

My time had been spent unproductively, in an attempt to clear away what seemed like a swarm of bees that had taken residence within my brain. Unwilling to be dislodged, they’d only ceased their buzzing a small amount when I first heard the sounds and started in their direction. I was curious.

Had they actually been his screams, rather than those of onlookers, I think that curiosity might have given way far quicker to the horror that inevitably overcame me upon returning to the beach.

They already had him under the arms, having dragged him from where he’d stumbled out of the water. Hair so typically neat, so recently wind-tousled, then hung dripping and limp from his forehead like a frayed curtain. He was drenched – having, as I managed to put together despite my shock, wandered into the sea in search of some clue – torso stripped down to an undershirt that was even then hanging from his form half in tatters and tinted an awful red.

“Mikotoba!” His name tore from my throat before my thoughts had finished turning, too many details left out of place and unsorted, all brain power that once would have gone towards doing so spent in useless panic. In a flash, I was down at his side, shoving a stranger out of the way in or



der to take my proper place. My hands started, stilled, hesitated, and finally made no contact with whatever wound it was that had painted his shirt. By some miracle, I finally managed to take action in the form of pulling one of his arms over my shoulders, and with the assistance of his own jerking, half-conscious footsteps we carried him off to a generous onlooker's nearby home.

With no regard for courtesy or the state of its fabric, I began to lower him down upon a sofa. Just as I'd finished and was moving to finally examine his wound, overcome with an ice-cold fear I'd never before felt at the thought of what I might see, the man himself seemed to shake out of his half-stupor. With a surprising amount of vigor, or perhaps desperation, he'd sat bolt upright and clasped a hand upon my shoulder tighter than I'd ever known it to hold.

"H – Holmes –" His voice was forced through gritted teeth, eyes far too bright with pain as they met and held mine with a surprisingly steady gaze. "The – the lion – murderer – in the water."

There, I panicked once more as the words of a dead man met my ears. Had Mikotoba been attacked by the same criminal? I broke the contact of our eyes in order to tear what remained of his shirt away and look upon the wound at his side, far different from any that I'd ever seen before – certainly not made by any gun, nor knife. It was as if he'd been clawed by some wild beast and burned all at once, and looking upon it I was left stunned.

"Holmes –" Despite his state, he saw fit to scold me, squeezing my shoulder once more while fighting for my attention. Rapidly, it seemed, his strength was failing him, and it was with panting breaths that he ordered me to bring him brandy. Suffice to say, I was surprised – he'd never been fond of the drink before, and certainly this wasn't the time. As I opened my mouth to protest, however, he hissed, "Now," and I willingly obliged by raiding our host's thankfully ample stores.

Upon my return I found that Mikotoba had laid back down, breath coming faster and the wound across his midsection standing out like a stain. I raised the bottle to his lips and he drank well, only to then demand from me hot water, which upon retrieval he bade I use to clean his injury. Never before had I been a medical man, and never before had I been so quiet, but in those moments – stunned into a frightened, wide-eyed and worried silence – I did naught but follow his each and every order.

It was not until he finally drifted off, having finished his last instruction, that I realized he'd guided me completely through the treatment – with luck, through the saving of his life. Without his guiding hand, I would have been useless, and I certainly felt the same once deprived of his assistance. For hours, it seemed, I lingered by his side, occasionally dabbing his sweat-soaked brow with a damp cloth. What sort of injury caused fever...? Had it gotten infected...? What was I to do if it had...?



“...Don’t drift away, my dear...” I recall murmuring, in my preoccupation neglecting to add his surname, “...I’m afraid that if you do, I’ll be left hopeless...”

But great minds do not long stay inactive, and it was not long before mine began to turn. Mulling over Mikotoba’s final words before attending to his injury, I suddenly stilled, eyes darting rapidly to the marks reaching across my great friend’s abdomen like the lashes of a whip.

The lion... in the water...

The murderer.

In the water, unseen, like the tendrils of a whip.

It was in that flash of genius that I pinned our culprit and raced to my feet, determined to finish the game even if I must finish alone. No, not alone – after all, it had only been my partner’s sacrifice that had led to the discovery in the first place. With the assistance of several fishermen, as well as the police, I took once more to the beach and in little time at all finally managed to apprehend our culprit.

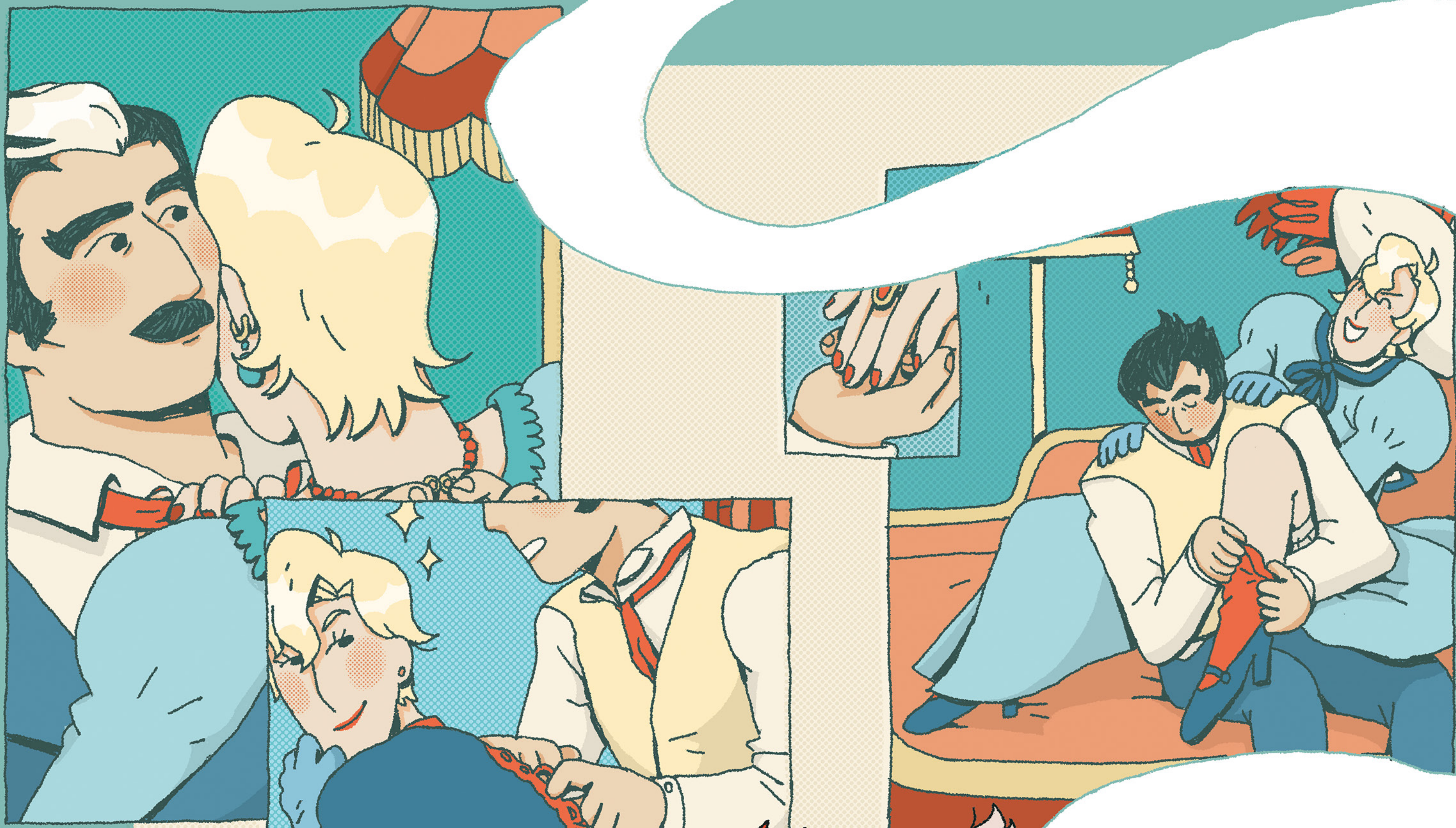
No man at all, but a fish: rather, a jellyfish. A particularly large, rare, and dangerous breed, the venom of which could easily kill in large, unattended doses. I am certain that, had he not advised me through the process of attending to him, Mikotoba would have indeed followed in the footsteps of our original victim. To have had such a presence of mind even while in great agony...

Ah, but I speak no longer of the case, do I? It is a remarkable tale, but reading over the markings left by my pen, I must say that it feels lacking. I recall not enough details of interest, and fear that this particular sort of storytelling is not, as it turns out, one of my strengths.

I think, perhaps, it is best for this case to remain unpublished. As I cast my eyes over these senseless scribbles, I hold no love for them, and find that my attention has wandered far from the story I’d endeavored to recount. Perhaps one day I will attempt again... in the meantime, I’ll keep this manuscript to myself. Should Iris press, I’ll claim I forgot our agreement, and any details of the case I may have used to do as she requested. I’m certain she’ll believe me – she always does.

I suppose I should inform my long-suffering, imaginary readers that Mikotoba was all right. Of course he was – thank God, he was. The relief I felt upon seeing him wake returns to me, now, as if not a day has passed. Yet, it has, and the man himself is not at my side. In his absence, it seems I have withered...

Hopeless, indeed.









lest you forget

by allie



This late into the year, the sun always rose only with great effort. All the early light it *did* cast became grey and shapeless, muddled with sea mist and the heartbreak of an imminent parting.

Holmes had not said a word since they had boarded the earliest train to Dover at Kings Cross. For hours, he had merely stared at his own reflection in the train window, unspeaking. Even now, standing at port with his eyes fixated on the dreary horizon, his lips remained firmly pressed into a thin line.

Yuujin did not know what to make of his silence. Around them, the crowd was bustling despite the early hour, restless with final preparations and tearful farewells. The time for Yuujin's own farewell was fast approaching, the minutes until his departure ever dwindling. And yet still, his companion remained unusually tacit.

They stood by the quayside for a minute longer, shoulder to shoulder, before Holmes spoke at last, eyes still trained on the horizon.

"I do not have many regrets, Mikotoba," said he, "but few as they may be, I believe that none will ever exceed the regret I feel over not being able to get to the bottom of this wretched case."

His brow grew clouded, then, and he clicked his tongue once before reaching into his pocket to

pull out his cigarette case. Yuujin turned to watch wordlessly as Holmes forcefully flicked open the case, placed a cigarette between his lips and lit it. He tossed the still burning match into the ocean, and only once he had taken a deep drag off the cigarette did he continue, his expression one of poorly concealed misery.

"I did not imagine it would be the thing to steal you away in the end."

As Holmes blew a cloud of smoke out over the sea, his words settled like lead in Yuujin's stomach.

"It was always just a matter of time until I would have to leave," Yuujin said softly, reaching out to brush a hand against Holmes's arm in a sad attempt at comfort. "But now that the time has come, I cannot help but wish that it hadn't. Or that we might part under more joyous circumstances, at least."

Holmes laughed mirthlessly at his remark. Farewells never were joyous occasions. They were entirely miserable – miserable as this morning, and miserable as the sun's slow, arduous climb into a sky turned dreary by grey clouds and dense fog.

It made for wretched scenery and only served to worsen Yuujin's mood. Next to him, Holmes stood solemn and quiet, save for his nervous fingers' constant fiddling with his cigarette. His ever-scru-

tinising gaze rested on Yuujin as it had so many times over the years, always considering, always *searching*, before, with an unplaceable expression, he flicked his cigarette to the ground and stomped it out somewhat violently.

And then, curiously, from his breast-pocket, he plucked his pocket square.

“My dear man,” he began, a wry smile creeping onto his face, “if you intend on going misty-eyed on me, I would ask you to at least dry your tears.”

Holmes’s meaning was not immediately apparent to Yuujin. He must have been pulling a positively despondent face for his friend to think him on the verge of tears when he was, in fact, not.

And now, he was holding out his pocket square to Yuujin, an expectant shine to his eye. He kept it pinched between his thumb and forefinger, leaving it to billow lightly in the sea breeze and unfurl from its neatly-pressed shape.

After a moment’s hesitation, for he was unsure what else he was to do, Yuujin plucked it from Holmes’s grasp.

“I am not crying, I’m afraid,” he said mildly, then let his gaze settle upon the pocket square – coarse and lustreless and the exact same pink as Holmes’s favourite shirt. He turned the stiff, starchy cloth over in his hands for a moment, and noted with mild amusement and a heart full of fondness how this makeshift handkerchief was entirely unfit for wiping tears with.

“So you are not,” agreed Holmes, his smile tilting into something more cheerful. “But who is to say that you will not feel like it later, Mikotoba? In that case, wouldn’t you be glad to have something to dry your tears with?”

Yuujin opened his mouth to protest, but Holmes

reached up to clasp his hands between his own before he could say but a single word. “Please,” he said, soft and low, seeking out Yuujin’s eye with a pleading look. “I insist that you take it.”



art by amiepsychique

The pocket square felt rough where it was sandwiched between their palms. Yuujin found his gaze wandering to the space it had always occupied – the pocket only inches from Holmes’ heart, its opening slightly rumpled and newly vacant.

And the one thing that could fill that gap, he was entrusting to Yuujin.

It felt infinitely precious, once considered thusly: a piece of Holmes himself, offered willingly, to be kept and cherished.

“I will take it, then,” Yuujin acquiesced. Gently, he freed his hands from his friend’s, and unfurled the now wrinkled pocket square completely. “And once I make it back to Japan, I will return it to you as soon as I can.”

He made sure Holmes’s eyes were following him before next he brought the kerchief up to his lips, and softly, he pressed a reverent kiss into the stiff cotton – a promise and an act of affection, both.

The action served to make Holmes flush a delightful pink. His expression caught somewhere between

embarrassed and petulant. “I would ask that you save yourself the postage, my dear man,” he said. “I fear that, should you not return it to me in person, I won’t care to have it back at all.”

In the distance, Yuujin’s steamship honked. He lowered the pocket square and frowned at it in thought. “It might be a while until I can come back.”

“I am aware, of course,” replied Holmes, smiling listlessly. “But perhaps it might serve as an incentive for you to return sooner.”

Around them, the other passengers were now moving to board the ship. “Then I promise to return it to you when next we meet,” Yuujin said, considering the kerchief in his hands for a moment longer before tying a knot into one of the pocket square’s corners.

The ship honked again more urgently, and when Yuujin looked back up from the kerchief in his hands, he found Holmes eyeing him curiously.

“So I won’t forget,” he said by way of an explanation and smiled.



Forgetting altogether would have been impossible.

The desire to return was a sentiment deeply rooted in Yuujin’s heart, begotten by six long years spent in dear company, far from home. But the outland now lay behind him, and what had once been so familiar lay before him as something foreign and strange.

But all the same, he strove to be who he needed to be – the head of his long-neglected family, a father to sweet, shy Susato, and a stalwart mentor to poor, bereaved Kazuma Asougi. He fit himself back into

a life he had not lived in more than half a decade.

Memorabilia and other belongings that he had brought back from England were carefully stashed away, yet never disposed of. His suits, he still kept with his other clothes, ready to be worn as soon as the occasion arose. Holmes’s pocket square, with the reminder of a promise tied into its corner, meanwhile found its home in a drawer, tucked safely between silk ties and other kerchiefs.

In a way, putting it all away was a concession: Yuujin, with his responsibilities and dependents, would not be able to return to England in the foreseeable future.

Holmes, however, remained convinced that he would be back before long. For some two years, Yuujin indulged him in this belief. His friend’s optimism soothed the ache of separation, and a most selfish part of him wanted to believe, too. But the paper they committed these sentiments to was more patient than any man; eventually, Holmes stopped mentioning his return altogether, and another concession was made.

But the neglected *promise* behind it was left to fester. Unfulfilled and unfulfillable, it haunted Yuujin.

It was the catching of words in his throat mid-lecture when he spotted a strangely folded rag. It was the pit of melancholy in his stomach when he found a dropped handkerchief. It was the bone-deep ache that overcame him as Susato placed a fabric sample – a dainty light pink – in his hand at the tailor’s, humbly asking if she could have a new kimono fashioned out of it.

It was the crumpled, dusty pocket square Yuujin rediscovered in a drawer, some seven years after his return to Japan.

He half expected it to smell of smoke, still. But time

had seemingly purged all traces of Holmes from it, and only an unfulfilled promise remained. Yuujin thought he ought to return it by now, include it with his next letter and accept the way of the world.

He found, however, that this was the one concession he could not bring himself to make.

And in another three years' time, he would find that he had done well in not giving in. As the White Cliffs of Dover came into sight, he tucked Holmes's pocket square into his breast pocket, close to his heart.



The sun rose over their farewell like liquid gold, this time.

Though soon to part from his dear partner yet again, as Yuujin stood beside Holmes whilst quietly looking out at the sea, he was content. Long overdue justice had been served, and decade-old mysteries had been laid to rest. The reunion he had thought impossible had come, and Holmes's hand was only a hair's breadth from Yuujin's own.

A few paces away, Naruhodou was talking to Iris. He was no doubt assuring the girl that they would see each other again soon with the kind of hopefulness that came so easily to the young. Yuujin could not help but smile.

He turned to look at Holmes next to him, only to find his friend already observing him, a grin stretched around the mouthpiece of an unlit pipe.

"I am certain that Iris has poor Mr. Naruhodou making more promises than he could ever hope to keep," he said blithely, catching onto Yuujin's train of thought effortlessly.

"Well, you cannot possibly hold it against her,

Holmes. Farewells beget promises to meet again. Perhaps, they are made bearable only through that."

Holmes shook his head and tucked his pipe away. "Oh, I understand as much," he said. "I simply believe that I, myself, am above such maudlin sentimentality."

It was almost startling, how untrue those words rang, coming from someone as decidedly sentimental as Holmes. Yuujin clearly remembered departing from England those ten years ago to his friend's farewell with a tender memento tucked into his breast pocket. A memento that, after all this time, he carried with him even now.

He peered up at his friend. "Are you, now?"

"Of course," replied Holmes, very sincerely.

Yuujin covered his mouth to hide his amusement. "Then I cannot help but wonder: do you remember the promise you had me make when we stood here ten years ago?"

Perhaps it was an unfair thing to ask when Holmes so clearly did not even remember his own sentimentality at the occasion. "Did I have you promise something? Indeed?" he asked. His brow furrowed in thought for a moment, then smoothed over again, giving way to a sheepish smile. "I cannot say that I remember, I'm afraid."

"Then," began Yuujin, casting a quick glance over his shoulder to make sure no one was paying them any mind, "please allow me."

Holmes froze as Yuujin reached up to nudge the shoulder strap of his bag out of the way and did not react until Yuujin had already unbuttoned the top button of his coat. Only then did he go red in the cheeks, hissing *Mikotoba* through his teeth.

Yuujin briefly smiled up at him before he popped

open the second button. “You had me hold onto something, back then,” he said, then untucked the pocket square from his own breast pocket. He held it up for Holmes to inspect. “I was to dry my tears with it, but I always thought it was about more than that.”

Holmes stared at the kerchief for a second before looking back up at Yuujin. “I fear that even I struggle to follow you right now, my dear man.”

“I intended to return it. You *had* only loaned it to me, after all,” said Yuujin. He rubbed his fingers along the soft cotton, until his thumb caught on the knot that he had tied into one corner, ten years ago. “But you told me you would not have it back unless I returned it to you in person. And so, I promised to not give it back until then.”

“Oh,” said Holmes. Yuujin smiled wryly.

“It is rather late to make good on this promise,” he said and tugged the knot apart, “but I am glad that it saw me back with you at last.”



art by amiepsychique

Holmes watched on curiously as Yuujin, rather unceremoniously, shoved his hands into his coat, pushing the flaps aside so he could access the breast pocket beneath it. Yuujin tucked the pocket square

back into its proper place – into Holmes’s ever vacant breast pocket – and allowed his hand to linger over his dear partner’s heart.

They stood like that for a minute, unspeaking. Eventually Holmes broke the silence.

“Mikotoba,” he said, slowly, “I *do* wonder. Does it really take a piece of cloth and a promise for you to return to me?”

Yuujin blinked at him in bewilderment. “Of course not, Holmes. I was always going to return eventually.”

“Well,” said Holmes, taking a step back to fix his coat. “I will not be taking any chances on this, my dear man. If a promise makes you more likely to return, then we shall make a new one immediately.”

The notion was ridiculous, of course. But Holmes was clearly aware of it, grinning brightly with his top button only halfway through the buttonhole, and Yuujin had never denied his susceptibility to maudlin sentimentalities.

“Then I promise that I will not let another ten years pass before we see each other again,” he said, amused and affectionate in equal parts. “Granted, of course, that you promise the same.”

Holmes looked back out over the sea, his grin softening. “I have a feeling dear Iris may want to vacation in Japan sometime soon. I believe I shall have to indulge her.”

“As do I,” agreed Yuujin. He turned his head to look back out over the vast ocean before them.

“Although, Holmes, if I may suggest something – perhaps you ought to tie a knot in your handkerchief, lest you forget.”



Finding Footing

by daggar



Disruptions, Yuujin thinks, should simply be expected when it comes to him and Holmes.

They've always been pulled apart in one way or another, whether by client whims or work commitments or circumstances. Their relationship has been cultivated in fleeting moments, brief pockets of intimacy that they'd carved for themselves en route to cases, or poured out onto paper, or snatched in the soft brush of hands against shoulders and knees under dinner tables.

But Holmes is standing in his living room in Tokyo, amidst trunks of worldly belongings soon to be unpacked. He's sprawled on the floor when Yuujin returns home from work, tinkering with some new contraption or another. He's there by his side as they stroll through Ueno Park with their daughters, and is *still* there when Yuujin wakes up in the mornings, snoring softly into his shoulder.

He's not going anywhere, Yuujin reminds himself, watching as Holmes appeases yet another young person who has stopped to request his autograph. They have all the time in the world. He can stand to be patient for one more day.

He sighs heavily through his nose and checks his pocket watch. Such a sentiment might have been soothing, if he hadn't been telling it to himself all

month. Because the fact of the matter is that they haven't yet had a single leisurely evening to themselves, much less a proper date in over ten years, and if they're not on the dance floor of the closest jazz club in fifteen minutes Yuujin just might lose his head.

Holmes nods along to whatever the young man is saying and then finally, blessedly, they part. Yuujin takes the opportunity to inch closer to the door of the club, in what he hopes Holmes will take as a sign to stop dawdling.

"Popular as ever, aren't you?" he says as Holmes returns to his side. He can't help a sliver of annoyance from slipping into his voice – the distractions have been getting tiresome.

"Apologies, Mikotoba. But when such a gentleman asks so politely, one can hardly refuse." Holmes leans in conspiratorially, lowering his voice. "And he told me he works as a policeman, you know. Undercover, as it were."

"Did he really?"

"Well, in not so many words. You know how it is. Now, a policeman, in plainclothes, seeking out a great detective? Do you not find it strange?"

"Well..." Holmes is circling towards *something*, Yu-

ujin knows, but it makes perfect sense that a policeman might be a fan of mystery novels. “He wanted your autograph, didn’t he?”

“My autograph, or my attention?” Holmes says, and then perks up with a wild grin. “Ah! See, there he is, still lingering by the confectionary there. No, don’t look.” He grabs Yuujin by the shoulders, spinning them around to face the wall. “For I am confident, nay, *certain*, that the man is hot on the trail of some urgent case, perhaps tailing the perpetrator, or off to interrupt an exchange of hostages... why else might he require the mind of a great detective and his partner, but for assistance in handling as precarious a situation as this?”

“As... what?”

“A *kidnapping*, Mikotoba. Kidnapping!”

“And you have deduced this *how*?” Yuujin asks, but the young man has summarily disappeared, and Holmes has already bounded off in his direction.

Yuujin glances longingly at the door of the club. He can hear the faint melody of an accordion from inside. So close, and yet...

He sighs and hurries after his partner. *I’ll follow your lead*, Holmes had said earlier this evening, when they first set out on the town, and yet it seems this habit of theirs is hard to break.

The streetlamps have just barely been lit, melding into the soft light of dusk. Yuujin hears the sharp clack of his shoes against the brick, in the rhythm of work and not the rhythm of dance.

Are they not the same? Holmes had asked him, just last week, even, on another run-around through the streets of Shinjuku. Yuujin hadn’t known how to answer him then any more than he does now. There is nothing comparable to the feeling of a dance of deduction; of stepping in tandem towards an ex-

hilarating conclusion. But this irritation, too, is as real as it is irrational, and when Yuujin digs to the root of it all he is left with is an improbable truth: that it’s the intention that makes the difference, not the act in and of itself.

He hates to admit it, even to himself. *Irrational*, he thinks, and swallows it down.

Holmes finally halts in front of a café, crouching by the window and waving for Yuujin to join him. Yuujin does, although he does not crouch; instead, he tries to appear nonchalant to passersby as Holmes whispers updates on the young officer’s position.

Yuujin tracks the number of minutes that go by as the man drinks, alone and unbothered, at his table inside. Three, five, seventeen, forty-nine...

“Holmes,” he says at last. “I feel as if the man has truly gone in for a coffee, and nothing more.”

Holmes stays motionless for a long moment; the only indication that he has heard is the minute tightening of his fingers around the windowsill. His shoulders sag and he releases his breath in a long sigh. “Dash it. I could have sworn...”

“Well.” Perhaps Holmes has taken them here for a reason, and they might as well make *something* of tonight. “We can pop in for a coffee, too, if you’d like.”

“No. I have no need for a coffee.” Holmes unfolds from his crouching position and dusts off his knees. His face is tilted down as he does so, half covered in shadow, but Yuujin catches the tight press of his lips before Holmes abruptly turns back to him, smiling brightly. “Although I must say, Mikotoba, there’s nothing like a good romp through the streets to get the feel for a city. And one of these days I’m sure to strike upon a case, don’t you fear!”

It’s an innocuous comment, one to which Yuujin

might otherwise reply with a dry, *I have no fear of that, I assure you*. But the juxtaposition with Holmes' earlier moment of hesitancy gives Yuujin some pause, and when he compares it against Holmes' similar behaviour over the past few weeks, an image begins to take shape in his mind.

"Holmes," Yuujin says, "are you homesick?"

Holmes stays still. His face is carefully neutral, eyes studying the drooping willows lining the boulevard. "One can't be homesick for a place that holds nothing for them anymore."

He had said as much the first time Yuujin asked about the move. It was no small feat to uproot one's life – a truth that had torturously etched itself into Yuujin's heart those first few difficult years of his study. But Holmes had waved off his concerns, insisting that nothing would change. Even his reputation could be rekindled anew in Japan, he had asserted.

Tokyo, London, Paris, New York... no matter the city there will always be mysteries in need of unravelling.

"You've been chasing after cases because you're worried, aren't you?" The image sharpens as he says so, disparate observations now falling neatly into one picture. "That otherwise it wouldn't be the same."

Holmes huffs. "I suppose when you put it like that, it sounds silly."

"It's not silly, Holmes."

"It *is*!" he argues. "After I promised to myself – to you – that I wouldn't feel this way. Wasting our evening – our past several *weeks* – on dead, on *imagined* leads. It feels –"

"Irrational," Yuujin murmurs. "Doesn't it?"

Holmes stares angrily up at the streetlamp, tapping his foot against the brick. Wrestling with his own conclusions. It's not long before he forfeits, anger draining into a weariness that settles over his shoulders.

"You *are* my home, Mikotoba. Wherever you are, my heart will follow. That's how it should be, shouldn't it? And yet, I –" He grimaces, shaking his head. "I'm sorry. I said I'd follow your lead and then dragged you along anyway."

Holmes has moved from the window to the streetlamp and now to a nearby willow, tracking a small, restless route across the sidewalk. He has never been one to remain still, and yet his roots run deep and unyielding. Yuujin detaches from his spot against the wall and reaches out, fingers lightly brushing Holmes' wrist.

"The clubs can wait," he says. The evening air is cool and clear, and the lights from the streetlamps glitter alluringly down the boulevard. "Come, Holmes. Let's go home, shall we?"



Murasame enters Yuujin's office whilst he is thoroughly, embarrassingly, distracted. It's the duller time of day – early afternoon – and he's had nothing with which to divert his mind away from the problem that is Holmes' homesickness.

Holmes himself hasn't mentioned it since their attempted date last week. Yuujin ponders possible remedies, dismissing ideas as quickly as they arise, and tries not to feel too frustrated for it.

Murasame shuffles closer and rearranges the stack of papers in her arms. If she's noticed his absent-mindedness she makes no comment.

“I’ve brought the reports you asked of me, Professor,” she says, setting them at the edge of his desk. She steps back, but doesn’t turn away. “And... there’s a strange man out in the hallway. He’s been peering into rooms and muttering your name, I think...?”

There’s no one else it could be but Holmes. As soon as Yuujin thinks it the man’s face drops upside down in the doorway, startling poor Murasame before Yuujin has the chance to warn her.

“Ah! Mikotoba! There you are!”

He flips himself around, hanging from the doorframe, and swings inside with a cheery, “Hup!”

Murasame mumbles a hasty goodbye and hurries out the door.

“Thank you for your assistance, my dear!” Holmes calls after her. He turns back to Yuujin, grinning with cat-like mischief. “You’re not doing anything urgent, are you?”

“Well...” Yuujin glances at the pile that Murasame had brought. “Nothing that can’t be done tomorrow.”

“Excellent!” Holmes says. He bounds across the room in three quick strides and drags Yuujin up and out the door.

“Holmes, where –”

“Ah-ah.” Holmes cuts him off with a flick of a finger, not slowing his pace in the slightest. “That would ruin the surprise, wouldn’t it?”

Yuujin allows himself to be swept out of the halls and into a rickshaw. Beside him, Holmes is abuzz, his knee bouncing and that sprightly smile on his face. A murder? A tangle of political intrigue? Something appropriately invigorating, clearly.

But they don’t stop at a police box, or Inspector

Hosonaga’s office, as Yuujin would have suspected. Instead, the rickshaw draws aside the familiar willow-lined boulevard in Ginza. Holmes jumps out and continues pulling Yuujin along, stopping to browse the window displays or dart into a few shops that grab his interest.

Holmes asks his opinion on watches, and purchases three sets of neckties, and briefly detours at a ramen stall for dinner. Afterwards they pop into a confectionary, Holmes cheerfully ordering one of each item on display. Watches, neckties, a confectionary... Yuujin attempts to decipher the connection, but is whisked away once more down the street.

At last, it’s a place that Yuujin recognizes: the café they had surveilled last week. Holmes steers him into a seat and requests two coffees, whilst Yuujin takes a look at their surroundings.

Perhaps he had discovered something of note here after all, Yuujin thinks. He peers after their waiter, wondering if this is yet another one of Inspector Hosonaga’s many undercover attempts, until Holmes draws his attention back with a question as to the quality of his drink.

Yuujin starts, abashed; he hasn’t tried the coffee yet at all, and the warmth is rapidly fading. But it is good, he discovers, especially when paired with the confections from their earlier stop. Holmes smiles and launches into an animated discussion on Iris’ progress with blood sample testing (“Imagine the possibilities, Mikotoba!”), his legs occasionally bumping Yuujin’s under the table.

It’s such a successful diversion that Yuujin forgets to stay alert. He notices only when the light outside begins to dim to dusk, after their cups have emptied and the customers have dwindled.

“Well,” Holmes says at last, with a sigh and a stretch.

“I’ve put it off long enough. Let’s get to it, shall we?”

“Get to...?” Yuujin replies, still uncertain of where exactly they’re supposed to be going. His hands curl around his cup as he scans the room once more for any sign of disturbance.

“To dance, Mikotoba! Dance!” Holmes snaps his fingers and springs out of his seat. “Unless I’ve assumed wrongly. It would, ah, not be the first occurrence.”

It clicks, then: the aimless meandering, the unhurried lingering at the café; all of it pointing to one glaring conclusion. “You mean to tell me that this is a date?”

“And you mean to tell me that you’ve just noticed? I thought I was being rather obvious.”

“But I thought that you – the case –”

“The only case worth investigating here is that of two fools bumbling through Ginza,” Holmes replies. “Or one fool, perhaps. For avoiding an otherwise pleasurable activity on the world’s flimsiest premise.”

“And that premise is...?”

“Fear,” Holmes says simply. “That it would be different. That I’ll dance with you in a Tokyo jazz club and be unable to think of anything but the dim corners of London pubs, and how it could never be the same, and of exactly how much I never wanted to know that I miss it. Which is bollocks, because I spent a decade living in that wretched city only wishing to be with you.”

Ah, Yuujin thinks, and remembers all the ways he’s ever ached for home. Across time, across space – in the flavour of oil used for chips compared to that of katsu, or the lonely clack of Western shoes in a

crowded dance hall.

“I won’t lie to you, Holmes. It *will* be different. And it will take some time getting used to. But... it’s a new experience that we can tackle together, I think.” *And a future that we can look forward to.*

“The same kind of different for the both of us, is that it?” Holmes murmurs, and then laughs. “Right as always, Mikotoba! You truly are the most clever, most reliable, most handsome – despite certain facial hairs which will remain unnamed –”

“*Because* of, you mean.”

“*Despite*, and don’t interrupt – kindest, most intelligent, most stunning –”

“*Holmes!*” Yuujin says, the tips of his ears burning.

“I could go on for days.” Holmes beams down at him, and the shimmering affection in his eyes warms Yuujin far more than the coffee. He offers a hand. “Well. Shall we? Before we’re pulled away by yet another distraction.”

“That’s more of a danger for you than for me, I’d think,” Yuujin remarks, and takes it with a grin.

Holmes doesn’t let go as he leads them down the boulevard. He doesn’t let go as they push through the door of a jazz club, opening into the dim light and clamour of laughter over violins. He doesn’t let go, squeezing tight, as Yuujin takes in the swaying crowd and the swell of music and the comfort of a hand – his partner’s hand – in his.

“It’s been... a long time,” he says roughly.

“And I’m not going anywhere,” Holmes murmurs, leaning close to his ear. He lets go then, spinning Yuujin out into a twirl. Yuujin’s brain catches up slower than his body – before he’s realised it, his feet have fallen into the steps of a once-familiar dance, twisting and tapping into a flourish of limbs. He

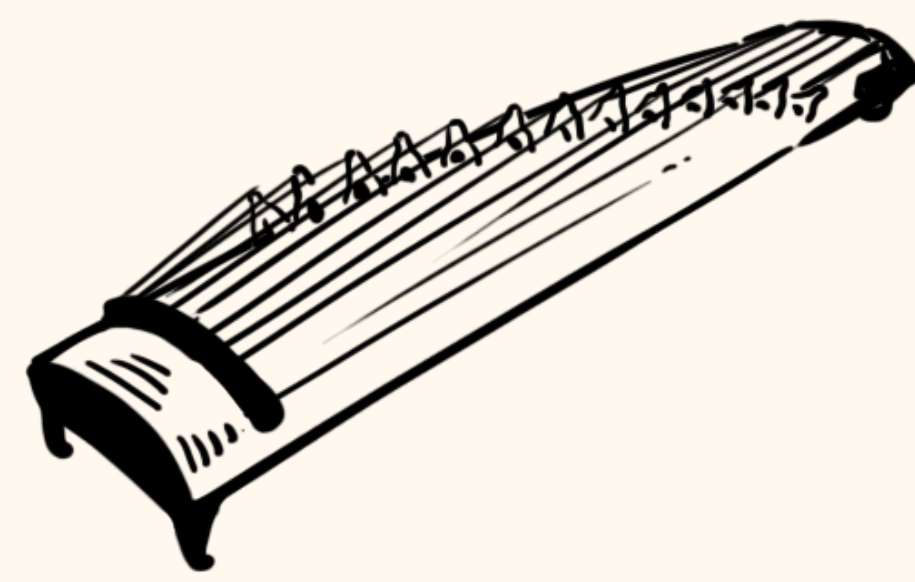
sticks the landing and snaps his eyes to Holmes'. His heart is thumping wildly, a smile stretched across his face. It's in these moments that he feels most alive: in the breathless pause between beats, drawn in and hooked under Holmes' gaze.

“Now, Mikotoba...” Holmes extends his hand once more across the floor, his smile steadily spreading until it's as wide and delighted as Yuujin's own. “Let's show them what we've got!”



the sound of music

by abrightgrayworld



Somewhere in the serene silence of the house comes a gentle pluck of strings.

At first, Sherlock thinks he imagined it, lost in the latest manuscript Iris has given him – but then it sounds again, lovely and delicate.

Sherlock pushes back his chair from the table and stretches, rolling his shoulders and cracking his back. He takes a moment to turn his face into the warm sunlight streaming in through the window, breathing in the air. *I must take a walk around with Iris today*, he reflects. Perhaps he will run into Kazuma and Ryuunosuke at the courthouse; he's heard that they're involved in quite the legal case at the moment. Hopefully, now that they're both back in Japan permanently, their relationship outside of the workplace will flourish as well.

A third strum beckons him, and finally, he follows the sound.

The door to Yuujin's study is half-closed. Sherlock uses the opportunity to hide partially out of sight, eyes widening as he sees Yuujin on the ground cross-legged, a stringed instrument with multiple bridges placed in front of him. Yuujin's first two fingers on his right hand have picks attached to them, his other hand poised in the air above the strings – Sherlock counts thirteen. Yuujin glides his pick-

ing hand across the strings, plucking concurrently with the other hand and moving the bridges; an arpeggiated melody floats out of the instrument, weightless and golden.

Sherlock sighs, awed, and Yuujin looks up. His mouth quirks, and Sherlock realises Yuujin had known he was there all along.

"Beautiful," Sherlock murmurs. "I didn't know you could play..."

"The koto," Yuujin finishes for him.

"I didn't know such an instrument existed," Sherlock marvels. With a glance at Yuujin for permission, Sherlock bends and examines it more closely. He runs his hands over the wood, the strings, experimentally moves a bridge. "It's quite extraordinary."

"It was Ayame's," Yuujin murmurs. Sherlock stills. He draws back and meets Yuujin's eyes, which have gone faraway and fond. "She was an incredible player. I had learned for a few years myself, but she was... the music was her soul. She *became* it." Yuujin smiles, reaching up to caress Sherlock's cheek. "Like you when you play the violin."

Embarrassingly, Sherlock has to swallow around a lump in his throat. "She sounds like she was a tru-

ly gifted musician. I am honoured by the comparison.”

Yuujin smiles again, then looks down at the koto. “I wanted to tune it again and play it, perhaps ask Susato if she wants to learn – we have never really discussed it.” A sharp, sudden grief causes Yuujin’s breath to hitch. Sherlock reaches for his hand and grips it tight, silent as his partner works through it.

“Can you play something?” Sherlock asks after a long moment. “I would love to hear you.”

Yuujin nods and settles back. His fingers move deftly over the strings as he pushes the bridges into meticulously precise positions, and a deluge of ringing, brilliant sound erupts from the koto. Sherlock’s jaw drops, and he is pulled into a symphony he has never heard. The structure of the music is different from Western music, and he resolves to learn more about it the next chance he has.

“My dear Yuujin,” Sherlock whispers when the performance ends. “I don’t even know what to say. Your wife must truly have been a master if she could play better than *that*.”

Yuujin laughs. “You are so easily impressed,” he teases.

“I am *rightfully* impressed; don’t make a mockery of my compliments,” Sherlock chides, amused. He reaches again for those talented hands and presses a kiss into each palm.

Yuujin sighs, charmed despite himself; Sherlock can always tell. “I could never.”

For a while longer, Yuujin plays and Sherlock listens attentively, tracking the expert motion of Yuujin’s hands. During a pause, Yuujin tilts his head, eyes straying to his desk. He gets to his feet suddenly. “Sherlock,” he calls. “Would you be so kind

as to fetch your violin?”

Sherlock blinks, thrown. “Er... alright?” He dashes into his own study and brings his violin back. To his surprise, on his return, Yuujin looks almost... shy. He has a few sheets of paper in his hands.

“What is all this, then?” Sherlock asks, perplexed.

Yuujin’s cheeks flush. “When I returned to Japan that first time,” he says, “I played the koto quite a bit to stay connected with Ayame while I readjusted. I sought out quite a few performances to which I could bring Susato as well. And one day, I attended a gathering during which a young lady played music on the koto in collaboration with a violinist.”

Sherlock sucks in a breath.

Yuujin’s hands flex around the sheets. “I know little of Western musical notation compared to you,” he continues, “but you did teach me some over our years in London, and after that performance, I couldn’t forget the sound of the koto and violin together. It took me many days, but I tried to notate the violin part as much as I could, and I obtained the music for the koto part after paying the composer handsomely. She quite appreciated it.”

Sherlock stares at him, speechless.

“I had imagined,” Yuujin says, soft, “that we might play it together, one day.”

Wordlessly, Sherlock reaches for the sheets. Yuujin hands them over, and Sherlock’s hands shake as he reads through the notes.

Yuujin has painstakingly drawn the staves and clefs on every page. The notation is annotated with question marks and attempts at marking dynamics, but the music is detailed, clear, and so full of careful, dedicated effort that Sherlock wants to cry.

“*Yuujin*,” Sherlock breathes, his eyes already sting-

ing. “Oh, you brilliant, wonderful man.”

Yuujin grins, pushing a hand through his hair. “Let us away, then?” he asks, eyes bright.

Sherlock responds by taking out his violin. He sets the sheet music against the top of a cabinet; the pages droop slightly, but he pays it no mind.

Yuujin begins to play. Sherlock listens for a moment, internalising the time signature, then draws his bow across the strings.

No. Wrong entrance. Sherlock winces, and Yuujin laughs. “Two, one, now,” he orders, and Sherlock hurriedly plays the note again, nodding to Yuujin with a grin and sheepish thanks.

And then the music swallows Sherlock whole.

Yuujin is right – this sound is glorious, filling the room with cheer and warmth. The steady, lively strum of the koto is a complement to Sherlock’s staccatoed bow and high, singing notes on the A and E strings. There are constant key changes – in as far as keys are defined for the koto, Sherlock thinks distantly. Sherlock finds that he’s forced to rely on his perfect pitch and music theory to course-correct. He’s forced to *improv*.

This is fun. This is *fun*! Music and Yuujin, two of his greatest loves!

Sherlock has never felt more alive.

When the piece ends, Sherlock is panting, sweat beading on his forehead. Yuujin looks just as winded, but his smile burns bright enough to rival the sun.

“That was unbelievable,” Sherlock murmurs. He crosses the room to Yuujin, cups his partner’s face in his hand, and kisses him, long and deep.

“Thank you,” Yuujin says. It comes out tremulous,

overcome with emotion. Sherlock thumbs the tears in Yuujin’s eyes away and kisses him again.

“Wow!” Raucous clapping comes from the doorway, where both Iris and Susato are standing, curiosity filling their faces. Iris gives a little hop. “Wow!” she says again. “That was beautiful!”

“It truly was lovely,” Susato says, warm. Her eyes are drawn to the koto, and Yuujin’s face softens. He beckons her closer, and she sits by him, caressing the instrument with an indescribable look on her face.

Sherlock leaves them to it. As he retreats from the study, holding a chattering Iris’s hand, Yuujin catches his eye, mouths: *Again?*

Sherlock nods, placing a hand over his heart. *Forever*, he mouths back, relishing the affection in Yuujin’s face.

A lifetime of love and music with his beloved partner, with his family. Sherlock couldn’t ask for anything more.



My Ayame,

It has been many years since I have written you a letter in this manner. The last few times have been during moments of grief – the first, in fact, shortly after we lost you.

Today, however, I had to pen my thoughts to you to capture the joy I have found in my life.

The years have been turbulent. My initial time spent in London did, to my relief, help me as I had hoped it would, despite the struggle to settle in. Together, over the years, Sherlock and I chased down many fiends throughout London, solved dozens of cases, visited every corner of the city. It was exhilarating. It made me feel alive again.

Until that final case.

Leaving the girl I named after you to my dear friend, who despite his brilliance was still rather immature, caused me incredible turmoil, Ayame. Sherlock took no offence to the hesitation in my decision. I remember the mortal terror in his face when I asked him to look after Iris with stark clarity, even to this day. Despite explaining that there was no other choice, he continued to question whether it was safe to leave her with him.

I was afraid, yes. But above everything, I trusted him deeply. He had become my closest, dearest friend, and I knew that he would rise to the task.

And he has. Iris is magnificent, Ayame. She has a mind that rivals Sherlock's, and she has taken to our family tremendously well. She and Susato are fierce sisters, and Kazuma is starting to warm up to her, too.

Yes, Ayame – our family.

You see, when I returned to London recently to address the repercussions of the series of events that sparked my return to Japan all those years ago, I found something had changed. This realisation struck me the moment I met Sherlock's eyes for the first time in years. My knees weakened; my heart thudded.

In feeling the same flutter of nerves and deep, overwhelming affection that I bear for you, I realised that I loved him.

I love him.

As I learned in the tender nights we shared together after the resolution of that accursed case, he loves me, too.

It has been two years since. Sherlock and Iris live with me, Susato, Kazuma, and Ryuunosuke in the house you and I built. It is a strange family, to be sure, and the adjustment to life here has been somewhat challenging for the Londoners. But we are all together, and we are all happy.

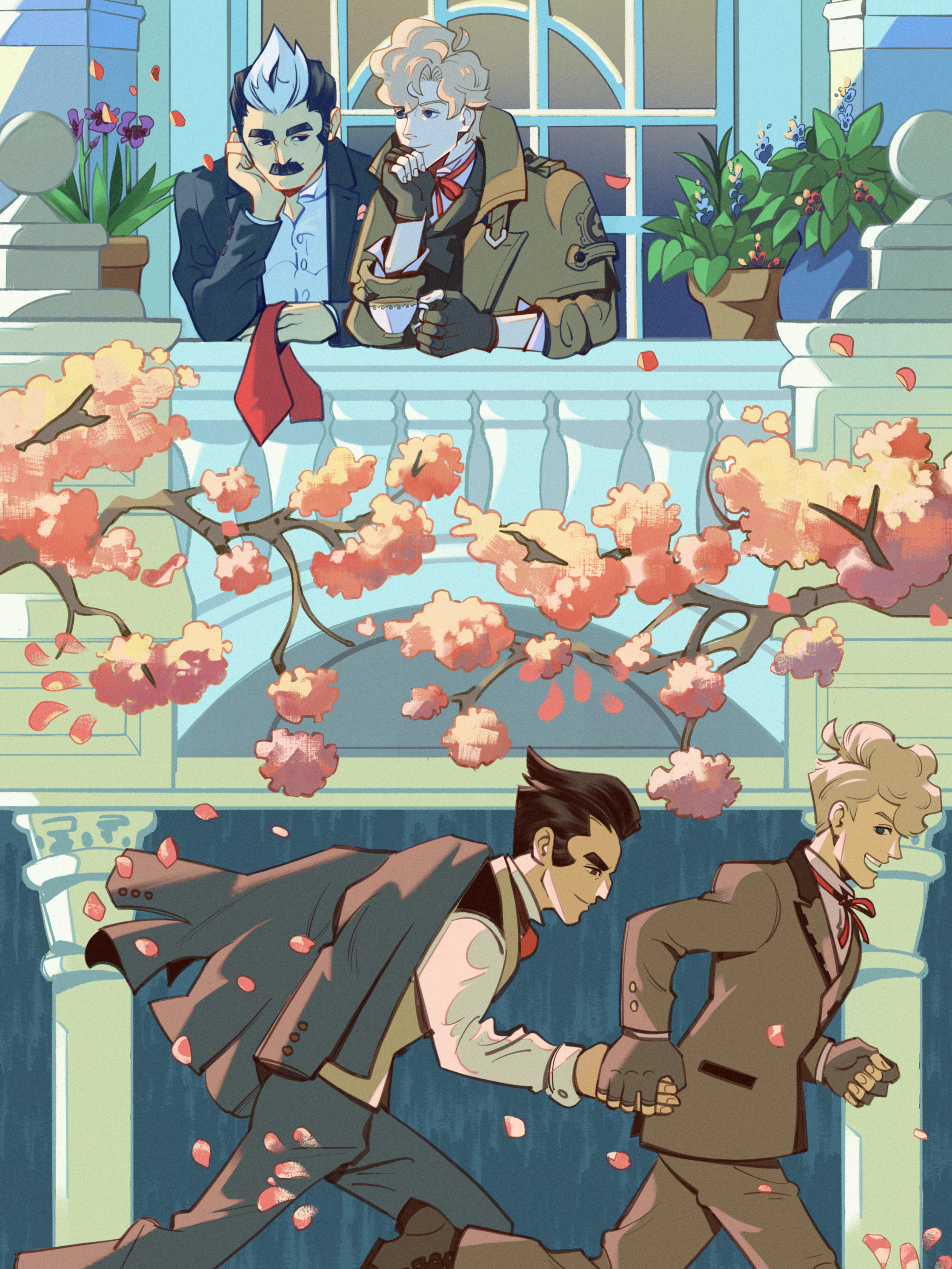
Even though your absence is a forever ache, even though I will miss you always, I am happy.

I owe you many apologies, Ayame. Apologies for abandoning my duty as a father to both Susato and Kazuma over the years, for keeping secrets, for letting our family splinter apart. But I am determined to do better for as long as I can, and I will hold onto this love with every ounce of strength in my body.

Just like you always wanted.



Love,
Yuzi~





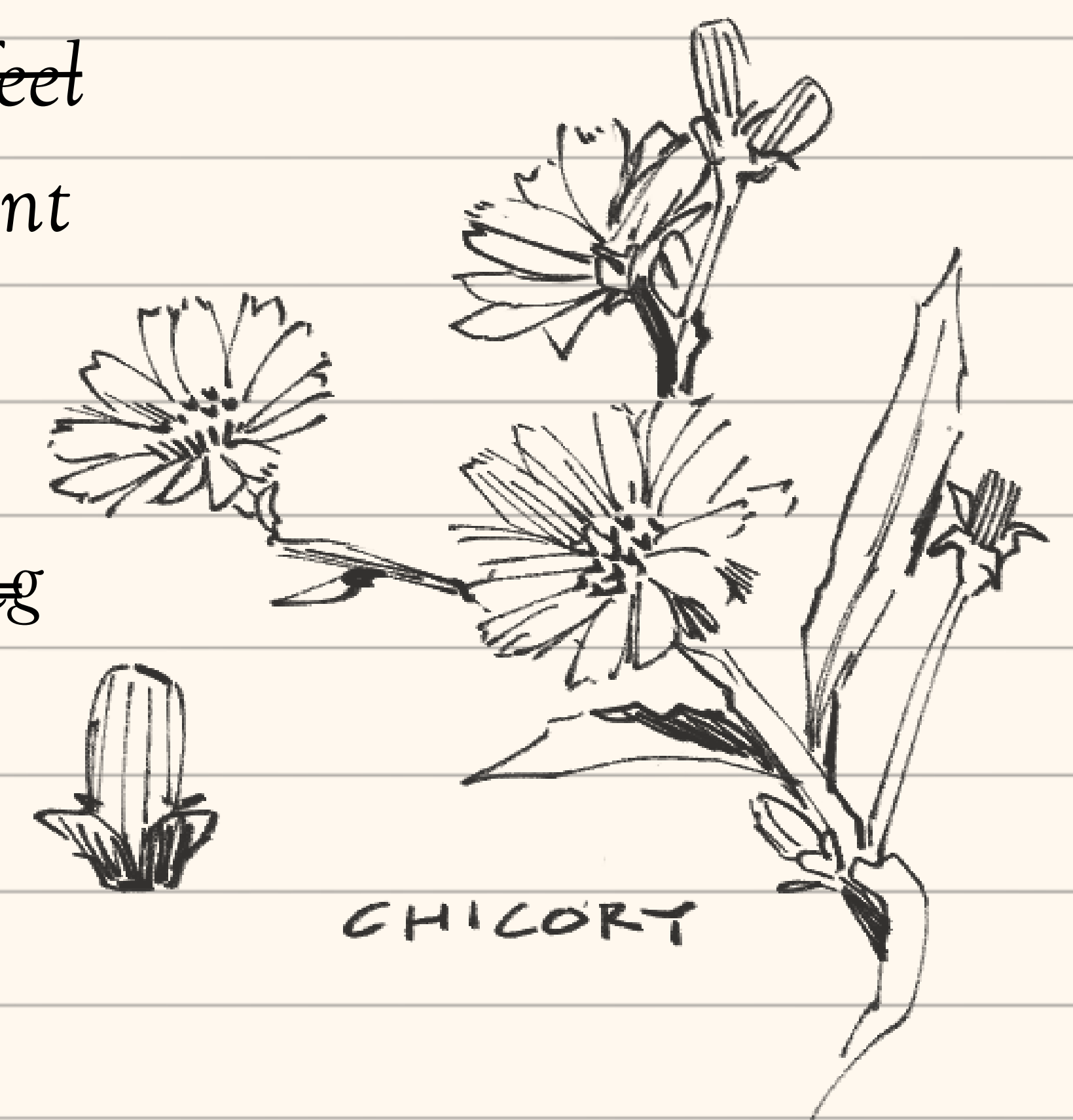
Written by Alice

Location: Place I've never been but seen while out and about. Several blocks away.

Purchase: Keeping it simple, so just one cup of coffee today. I feel like I can taste more chicory here than normal. Not entirely sure if I like it. I also bought a currant cake that is quite good. I think I will buy another to take back to Holmes. ~~Not that he entirely deserves it. While composing something yesterday, he kept repeating a strangely monotonous musical phrase again and again. That refrain continues to repeat in my head like the tune in a music box.~~ (Note to self: Irrelevant. This is not my diary.)

Effects: Even if my suspicions are correct - that there is a great deal of chicory order to extend the amount of their supply - this is still some coffee in here. Meaning

that after a few sips, my grogginess is starting to abate and the world suddenly feels a lot more correct than it did just a few moments ago. ~~Sometimes you can feel that way in the presence of a person.~~ (Note to self: I'm only meant to be talking about coffee during this experiment.) It's disconcerting that a mere drink can produce this effect. ~~Although the effects of a person can be sustained ad infinitum while something you must consume cannot be.~~ (Second note to self: Seriously, self, try and stay focused on your goals here.)



Monday,
09th



Location: A stand one block away. Appears to have materialized overnight.

Purchase: One cup of coffee. Tasted fine, just like the object of yesterday's observation. However, although this makeup of ingredients appears to be the same, this cup tastes slightly better than yesterday's. The chicory doesn't seem as overpowering. The enamel pot seems nicer here. Perhaps that's why?

Effects: Happier than before. Less tired. Because, as you know, that is what coffee is supposed to do.

...I do wonder if my whole experiment will be like this. Will I go to every stall in the vicinity and then just write an entry that essentially says, "I had coffee. It made me feel good?" Holmes is right, he needs to get a new case very soon. We are both at our wits end with boredom.

Also, clearly I have given up on not weaving in aspects of my life unrelated to this experiment.

I say "we" instead of "I" very deliberately. As I alluded to previously, I know he's been staying up late composing a song for many nights in a row. Incredibly, if he knows I am sleeping, he doesn't try to rehearse it on his violin. Somehow he seems to be able to know what sequence of notes will sound good without having to test them out. I asked him about this and then had to listen for a long while as he expounded on how mathematics make up the basis of music and, therefore, getting it right is perfectly logical, and so on and so forth.

(I did interject after a certain point with a pun I knew was terrible, but it simply had to be said.)

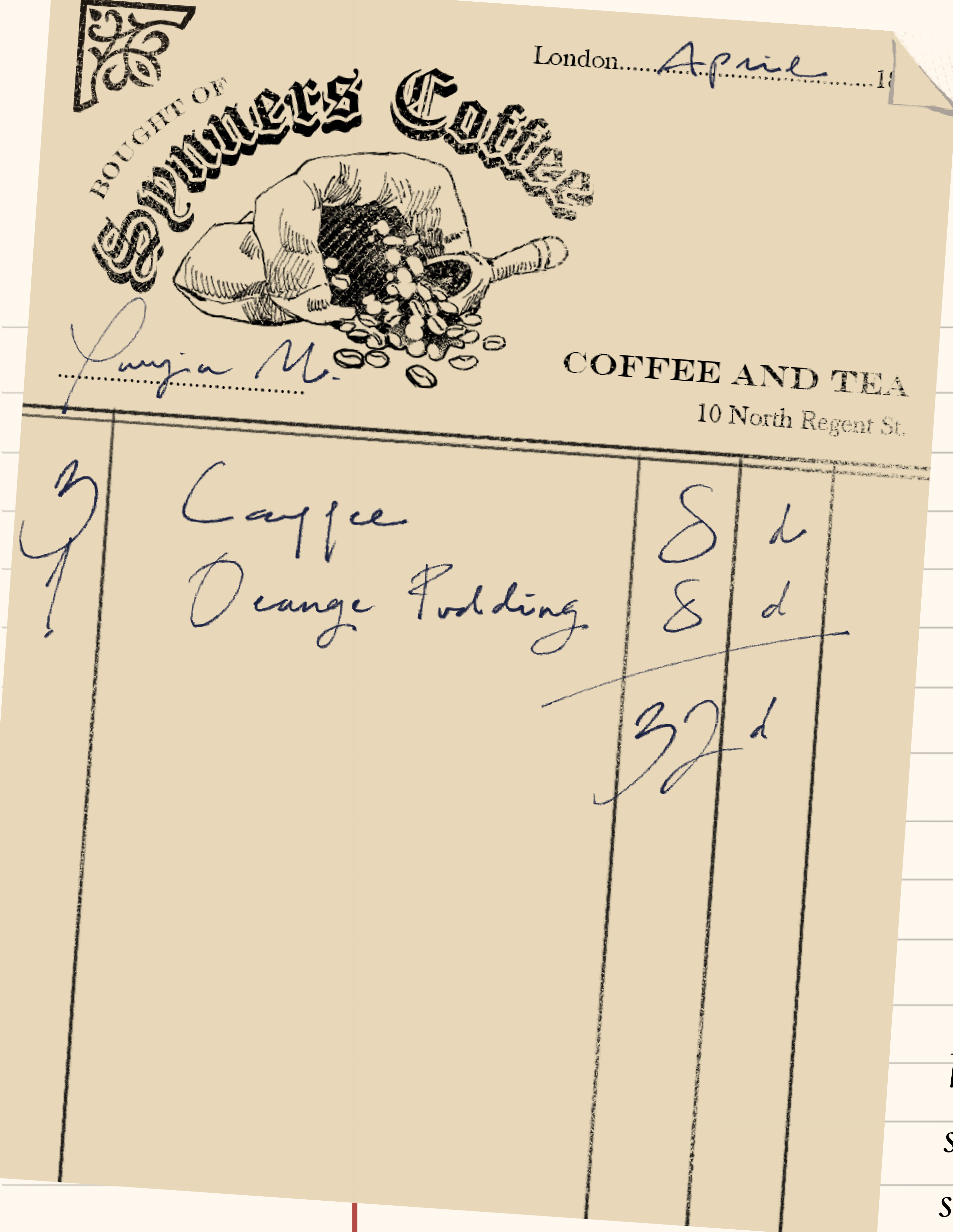
"Say, Holmes, isn't it more accurate to say a musical composition is sound."

He paused and glared the way people sometimes do when they're running and something forces me to stop. Then he said, you could tell someone has mastered a second language when they are able to make jokes in it. Somehow that made me feel more successful than if he had laughed.)

All this to say that the man does know what he's doing when it comes to music. And yet his latest composition does sound uncharacteristically drab and atonal and I am curious about why.

I did attempt to investigate this but I can't read sheet music. Therefore, all I can tell is that he's being flippant in the directives to himself in the composition's margins. This morning I took a peak at the papers Holmes had left strewn about after last night's efforts, and near the top right corner of one page he had written: "play in a disarmingly cheerful way as though you're going through a bout of selfloathing and frolicking is the only answer." A very specific directive, but I suppose that's the point. Although the standard musical notations tend to be just a word or three in Italian, so maybe he's actually doing this wrong.

Ah, even if I've elected to allow myself some room for editorializing about my life, this is still a bit too much opining about Holmes. How did that happen?



Location: Near work. I go here all the time.

Purchase: Three cups of coffee. One for myself, two for my colleagues. When I realized I would have to juggle them all the way to my office I elected to quickly drink the cup meant for myself...

Effects: ...Which was a mistake. Coffee is always bitter, but never have I feared the ratio of acid in my stomach more than I do this very moment. Housing is expensive in this area (this is why I live a distance away with Holmes, after all) and the well-heeled locals like to brag that every establishment in the area serves the very best. This supposedly includes the coffee stalls. I suspect "the best" simply means the strongest, most caffeinated option.

I feel very alert, however. I imagine that the wire in a lightbulb must feel this way.

Perhaps Holmes somehow got his hands on this coffee yesterday. He was clearly still awake from the previous day when I came downstairs for breakfast. I was going to remind him of the restorative powers of sleep but the dark circles under his eyes made me refrain. I don't like kicking a man when he's down. ~~(Although something about this really does differ from when he's melancholy over a lack of a mentally stimulating case. I can't let this assumption go, for some reason.)~~

Instead I made him some tea that's had a good track record of calming him down in the past. When he finally left for bed I took another look at the sheet music he has been laboring over. I think he knows I have been spying on his work because all of his notations in English have been crossed out and the directives are in Italian. I took notes on them though: amore, lacrimoso, mesto, tristo, divisi.

I know that the first one must mean something like "lovingly" (that really doesn't fit the nature of the frantic music that Holmes has been performing though), I brought them all to a colleague at work who is a fellow exchange student, albeit from Italy. He confirmed my translation of the first, then laughed at the middle three. They all expressed sadness, he said, and asked me if I had been looking at the score of a tragic opera.

The last one puzzles me, though, even after translation. I was informed that “divisi” meant “divided.” We consulted another colleague - one who knows how to play the cello – and he said that it’s a notation that indicates two musicians should take one of the two notes in a dyad.

From his description, though, it makes no sense as a notation for a piece meant to be played solo.

Maybe Holmes is writing a duet of some kind and this is only half of it?

May, 18

Tuesday
08th

Location: The stand one block away that seemingly materialized overnight. If it’s even the same stand? Appears to have an entirely different appearance and staff.

Purchase: Appears to have entirely different coffee as well. I purchased one cup of coffee and it tasted entirely different from the cup I had here a few weeks prior. I purchased another one after that to be sure. Taking another sip to be sure.

Yes, it definitely tastes different.

Effects: Or maybe it’s the same and my powers of observation are entirely off today. Although I don’t know why I would believe that of myself. Today is entirely ordinary, after all, and I got a decent amount of sleep. There’s nothing earth shattering that I can point towards as any obvious source of disquiet.

All right. No. I do have a reason.

Two days ago, I took a look at Holmes’ latest efforts in composition. He definitely knows I am spying, now, as they have become increasingly fanciful and odd over the past few weeks. I have to assume it’s meant to make me laugh before I head out for the day. As I have said before, I cannot read music. However – just as one example – even I can tell that notes shouldn’t wander quite so far above and below the staff. Nor should notes taper off into swirling curly-cues. I asked him how to play the latter to see what it’s meant to sound like. He just said “you’re supposed to improvise. Just play that note as if you plan to inconvenience someone for life.”

Today, though, the notes appeared perfectly normal. There seemed to be an abundance of musical terminology.

Today, the first eight were the following:

malinconico
incalzando
klangfarbenmelodie
obbligato
tempo rubato
ostinato
battuto
accarezzevole

As usual, I brought these terms to my Italian coworker. A couple of them express love and longing (like the collection of words from last time) but others do not fit that particular pattern. They don't even adhere to the same language. One of them is, in fact, in German. According to yet another coworker it indicates that each portion of the melody should be divided up between other instruments.

I spent so long trying to derive meaning from each individual word that I neglected to see the very obvious solution.

The first letter of each word spells out my family name.

This should not be as unsettling as it feels. After all, as I said, he is fully aware that I have been amusing myself by looking at his compositions. He has already been throwing in visual jokes to amuse me. Addressing me directly - albeit in a coded way - should not be such a shock to the system. If anything, it's a logical escalation of this series of musical antics.

6月 - 18.

Location: Home

土
曜
9
日

Purchase: No coffee today, nor have I made any purchases (well, I suppose I have, in a roundabout way, since we split funds on food), Holmes made me some tea today. It's bitter - I think he steeped it for too long - but I don't mind it. He had it ready for me when I came home from work and it's been a miserable rainy day. It is a most pleasant way to warm up.

Effects: I feel the need to write in my birth tongue today, for some reason.

Well, actually, the reason is so that Holmes won't be able to read this, yet. This is hypocritical since I've been spying on his compositions for weeks now. The act of spying itself is not the hypocritical part. The hypocrisy comes from the hope I have that said compositions are expressing more than music. And yet I feel too bashful to yet entertain the possibility of Holmes covertly reading this and being able to likewise read between the lines.

Anyway. Black tea is interesting. It is never the jolt to the system that coffee provides. Its effects take their time, somehow being even more slow and languorous than alcohol.

Earlier in the week we discussed the theory that electricity and magnetism are linked. This is not my branch of science so I can go no further than that. It isn't Holmes's branch of science, either (not that I know what his is, actually). All the same he seems determined to prove it.

And so I didn't bat an eye when I came home to find that Holmes had put away a lot of his sheet music. Now that table is covered in all sorts of tools and gadgets and he is in the middle of putting a machine together.

For the past few hours I have sat here, watching him fiddle around with his work. He rarely likes to talk when he is busy like this and I often need to sit in silence after work until I stop thinking about blood and guts and grief stricken patients. Normally this arrangement suits me just fine. I was at peace, actually, even when my questions about how he encoded my name into music had lain just on the tip of my tongue.

In the last few moments, though, we did end up discussing electromagnetism some more. Specifically how it is proposed that it travels on oscillating waves. He added that you could likely send sound traveling great distances if you knew how to harness electromagnetism properly.

Then he drew what he thinks sound waves must look like: up and down squiggly lines, not unlike the new machines back home that measure the strength of earthquakes. ~~Sometimes being around Holmes is like being in a mild earthquake, actually.~~

I asked him if these sound waves would look different based on the type of sound, and he thought they would not. I remember his next words so well I feel confident recording and translating them close to verbatim:

The waves might skew wider for loud sounds while they might be more compact for quiet sounds. Otherwise the shape of the waves for a wonderful symphony likely look very similar to the waves that would be produced if someone whispered your name.

I had no idea what to say to that, so I just smiled like a fool. He dove back into his work and we have not spoken again since, this entire evening.

I am keenly aware of the sounds we made, though: his sighs whenever something does not go to plan. My teacup rattling in its tray. The sound of this pen scratching against the paper. It seems so strange that, within the next few years, you could potentially capture these exact sounds and transmit them all the way to the other side of the city.

What's stranger is that my heartbeats sound so much louder than all of these things, and yet I do not believe any technology can capture how truly loud they feel.

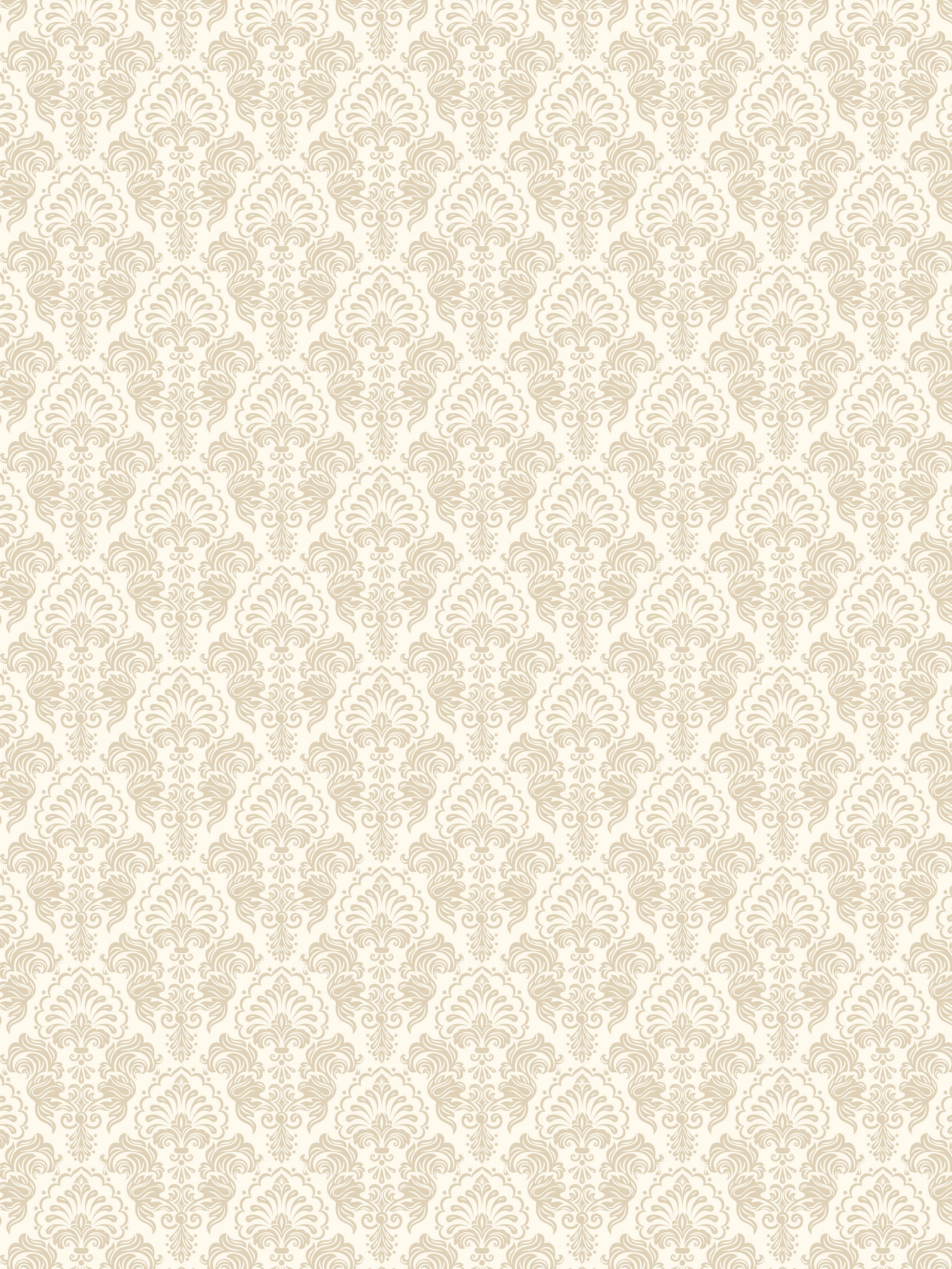
January, 1897

Sunday
11th

Soon after I wrote this entry, I felt so befuddled and emotional I bought an entirely different diary. I was probably engaging in a bout of magical thinking that made me think a book with clean, new pages would give me a likewise pristine mind. You even asked me what happened to my old notebook. I said I lost it and I could tell you knew I was lying.

I found this again among my things and I thought it would be fun to mail it to you. I believe you probably have the knowledge to translate my last entry. I hope you enjoy seeing how much of a besotted fool I was nearly twenty years ago.

Not that much has changed on that front, I am afraid. At least I know, now, that I was not alone.



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Fortune's Favourite





Delaney

 shcherbatskayas
 shcherbatskayas

The Sulking Detective

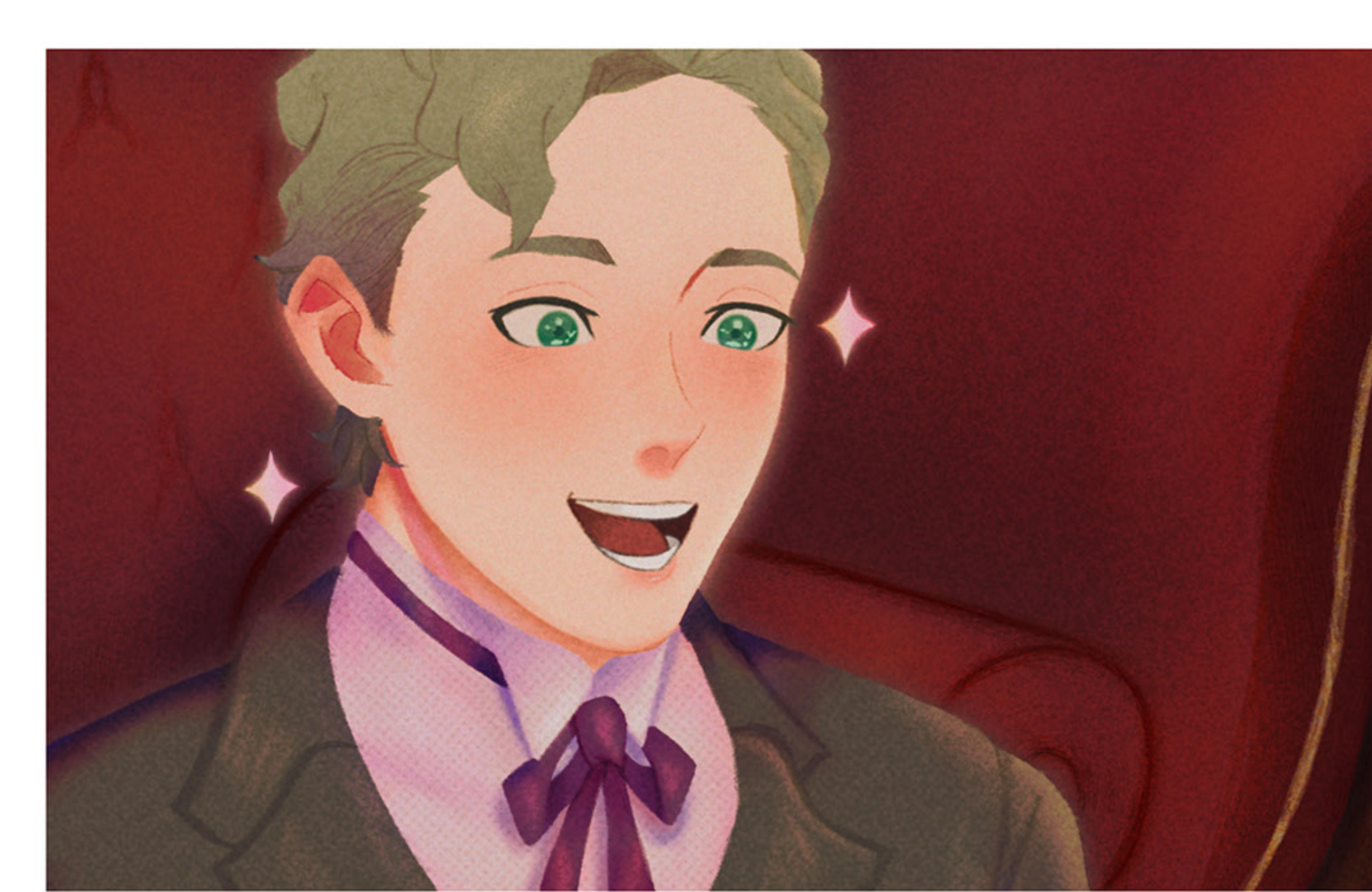


Nic

 Nicandragon
 Nicandragon



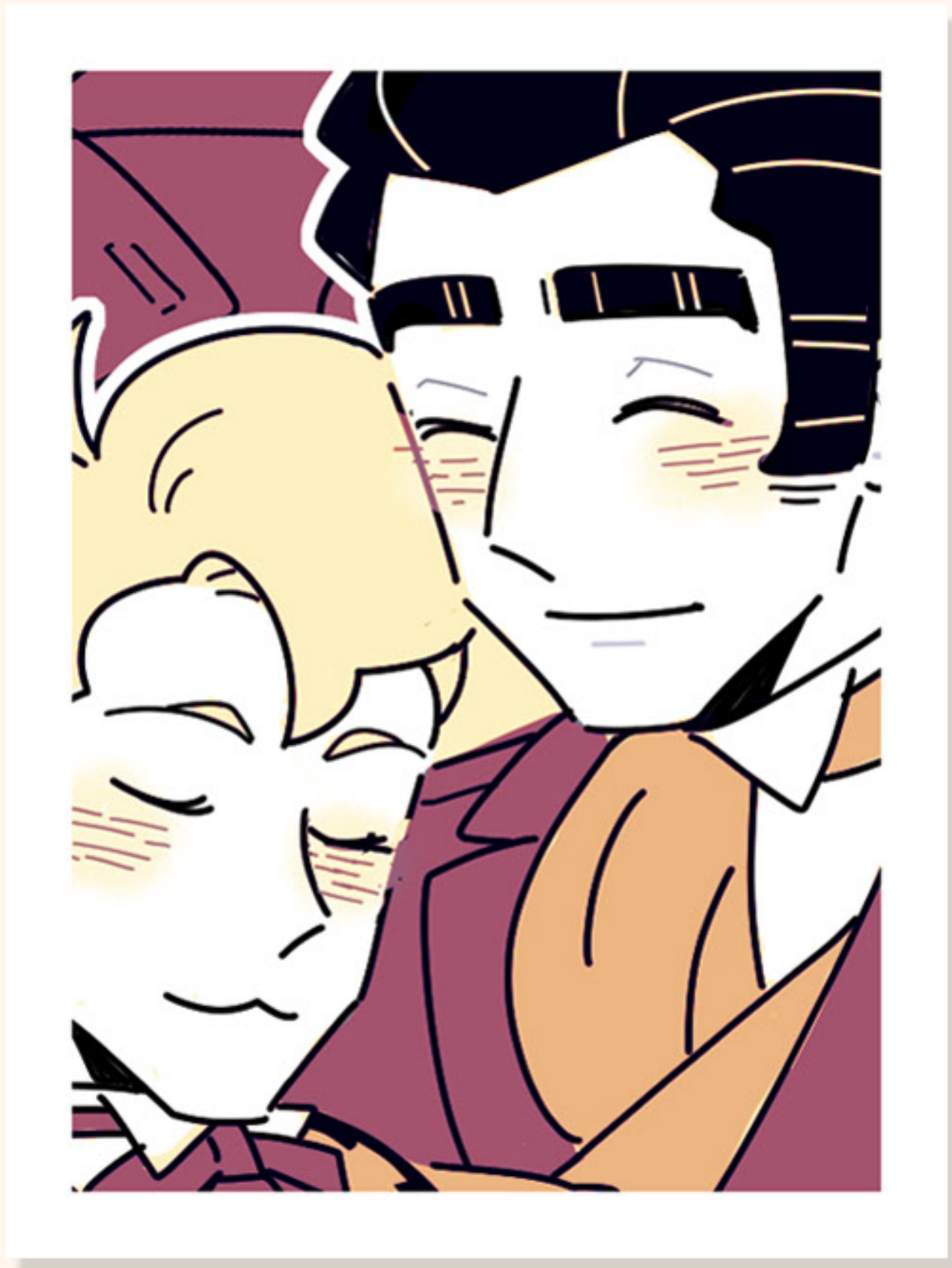
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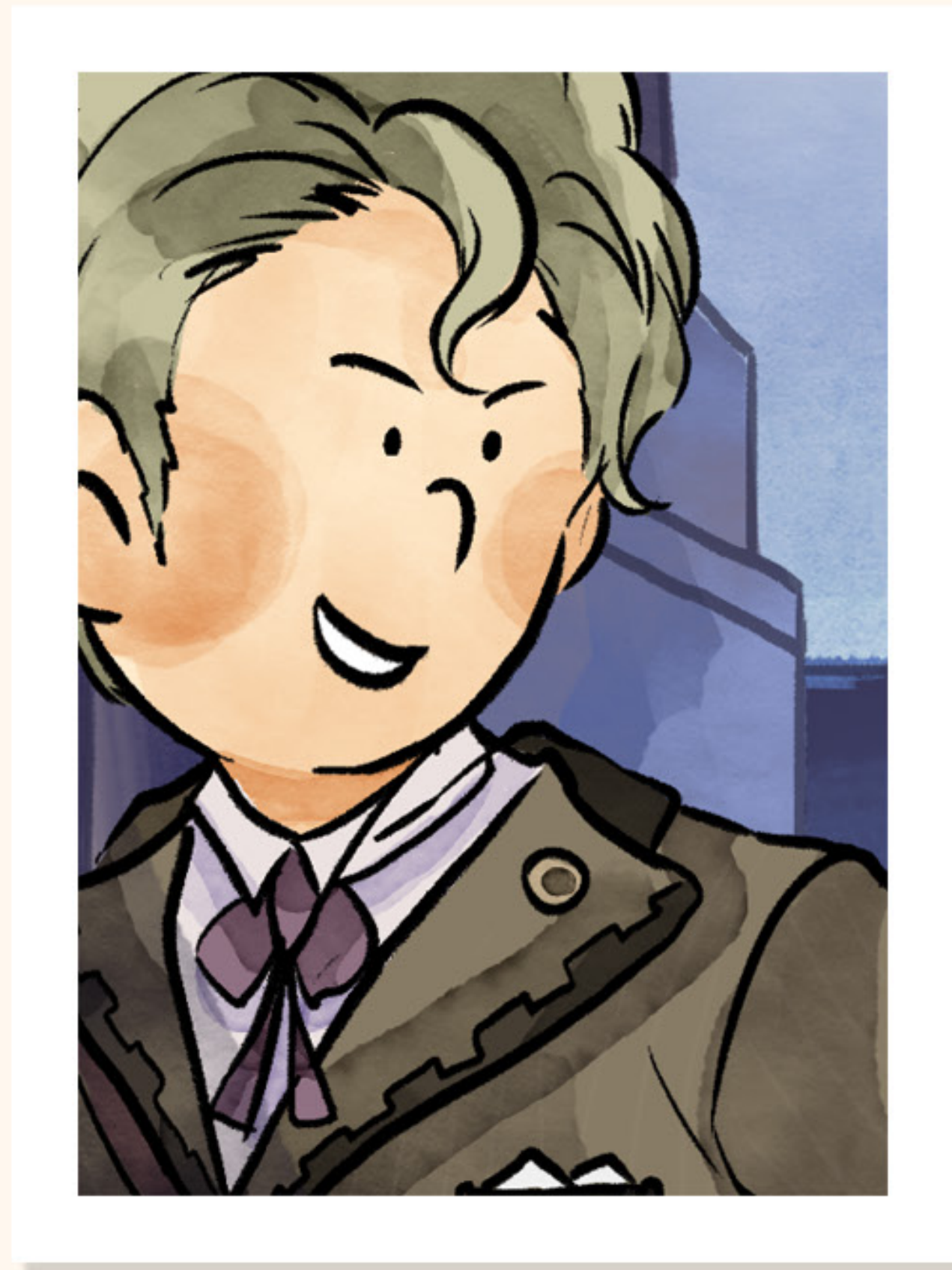
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Nana (@loiska_j)



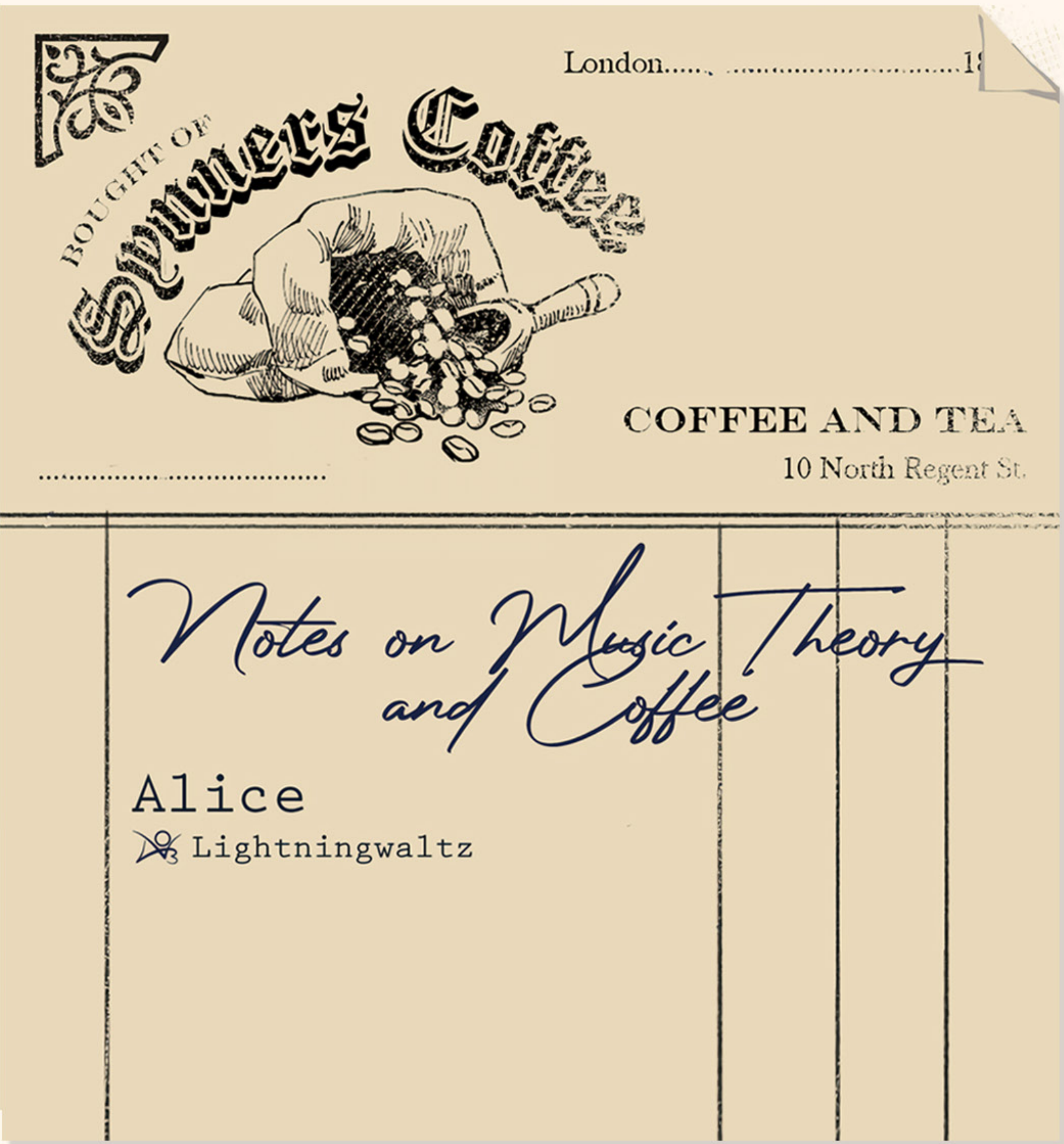
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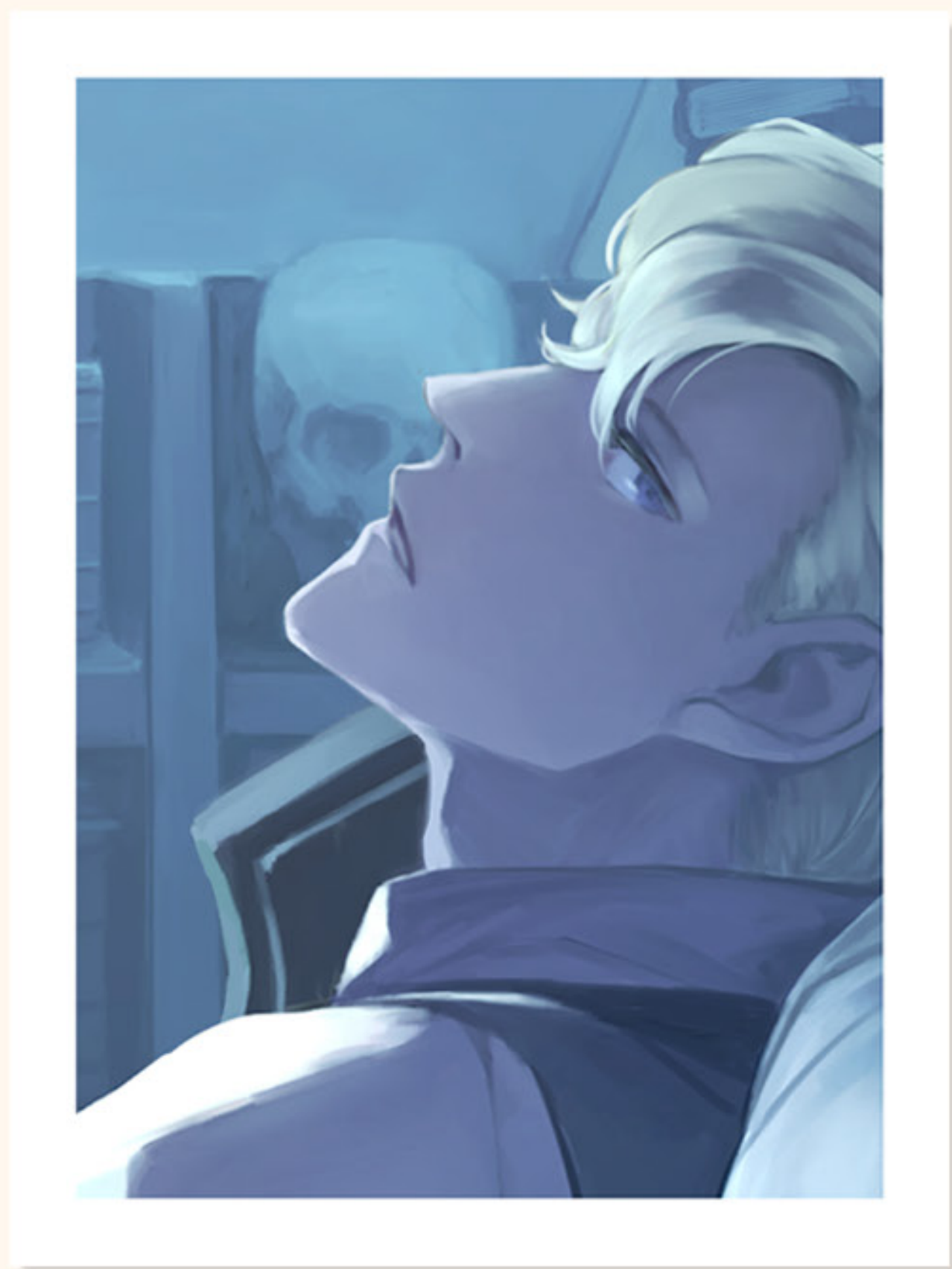


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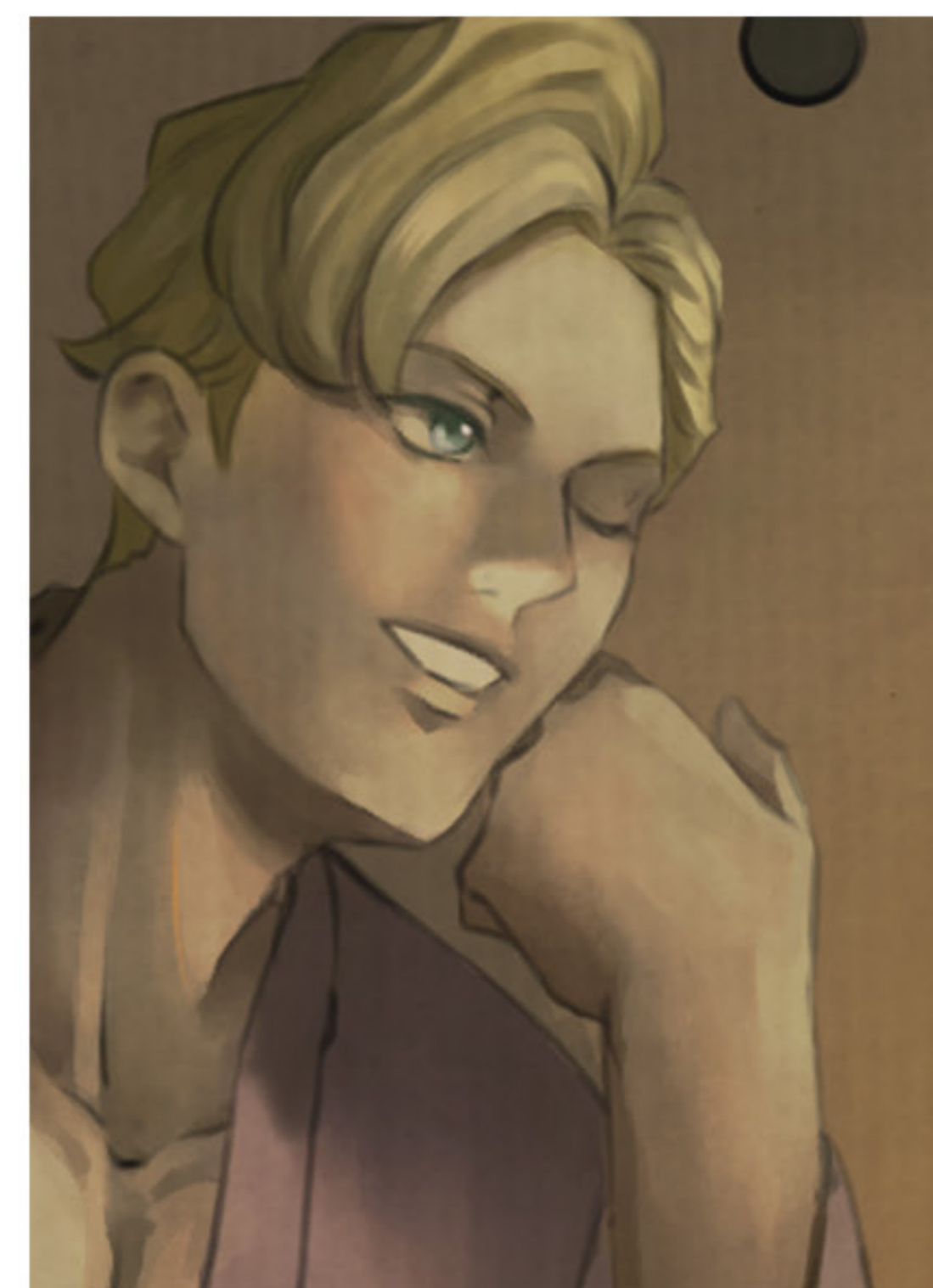


Seeing Red



Mak

🐦 HollyJollyMak
🌿 hollyjollyturnabout



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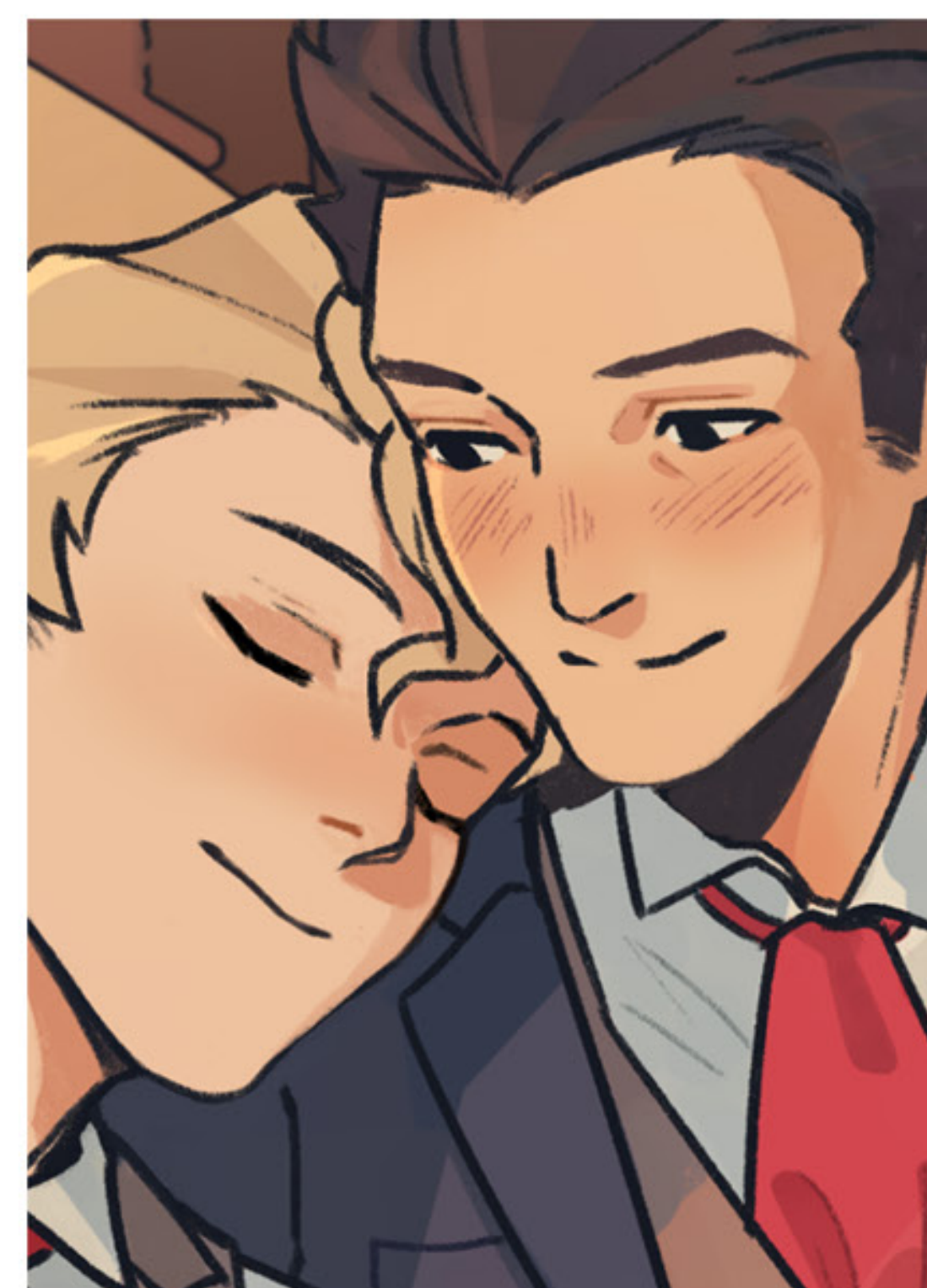
wk (@ikioi_aka)

The Adventure of the Damascus Band of Cœur d'Cœurs



Ribbon

🐦 ribbon_road
🌿 ribbonroad



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(@peachcott)



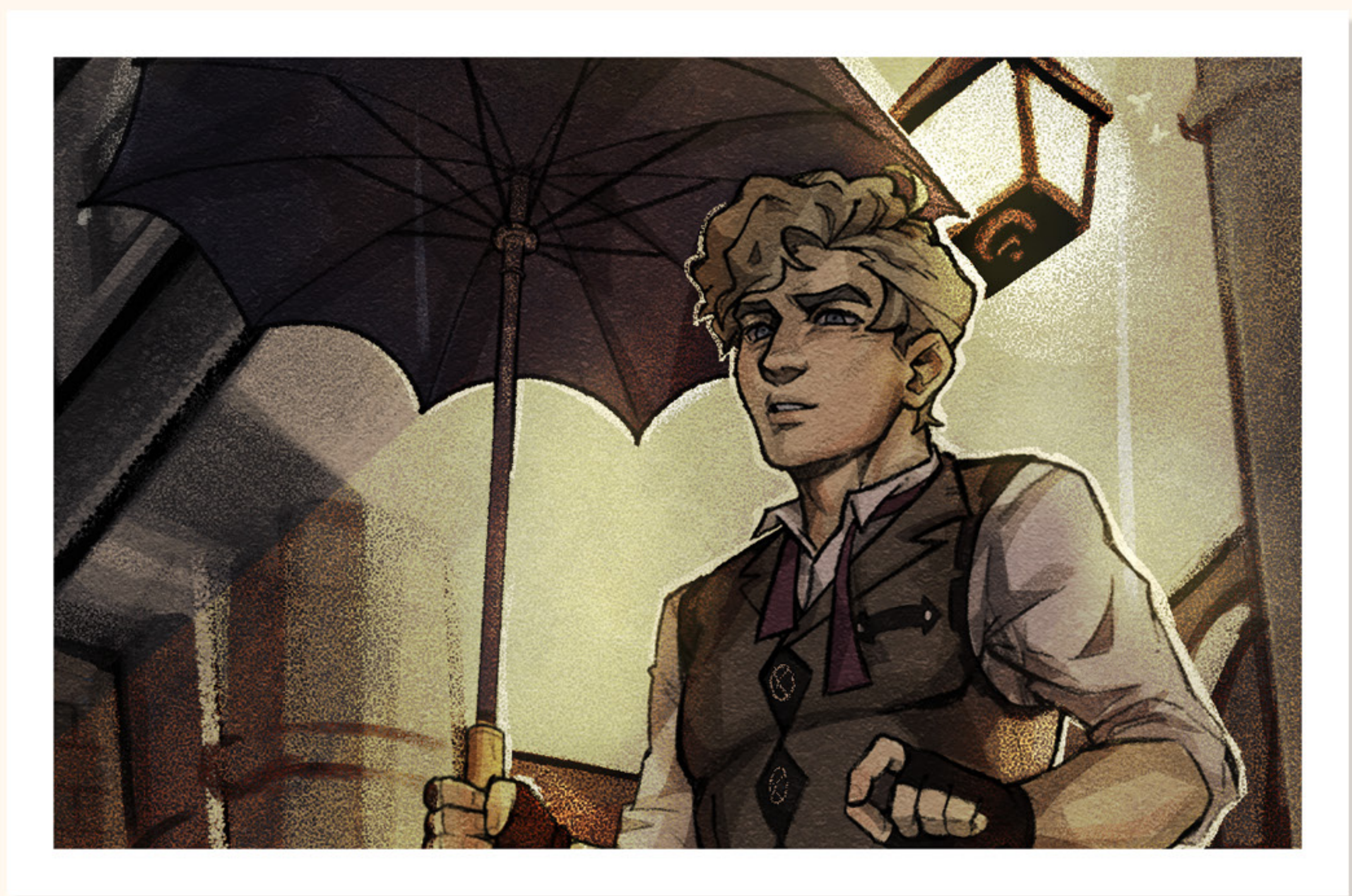
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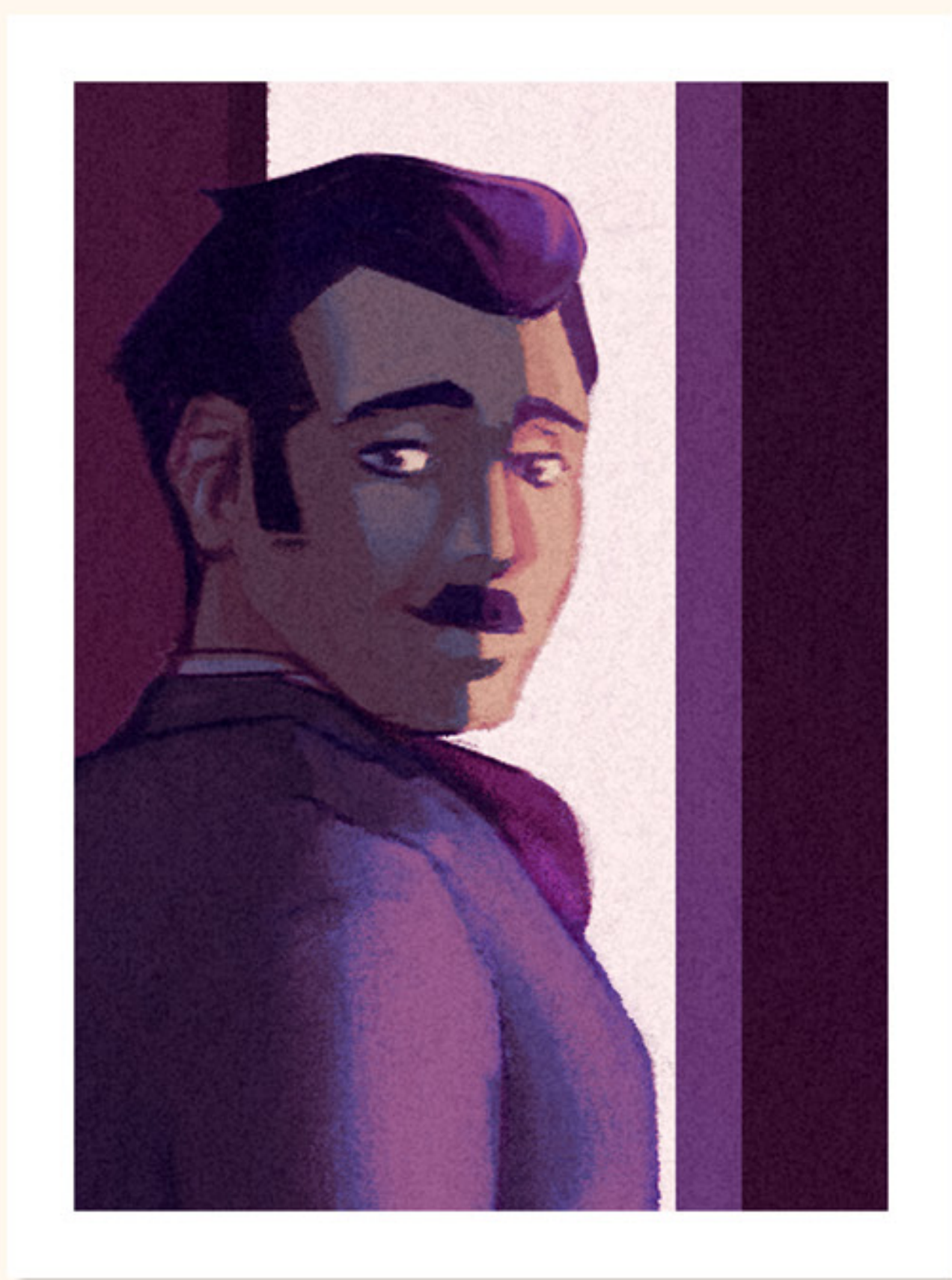
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Kitsunico (@KITSUNICO)

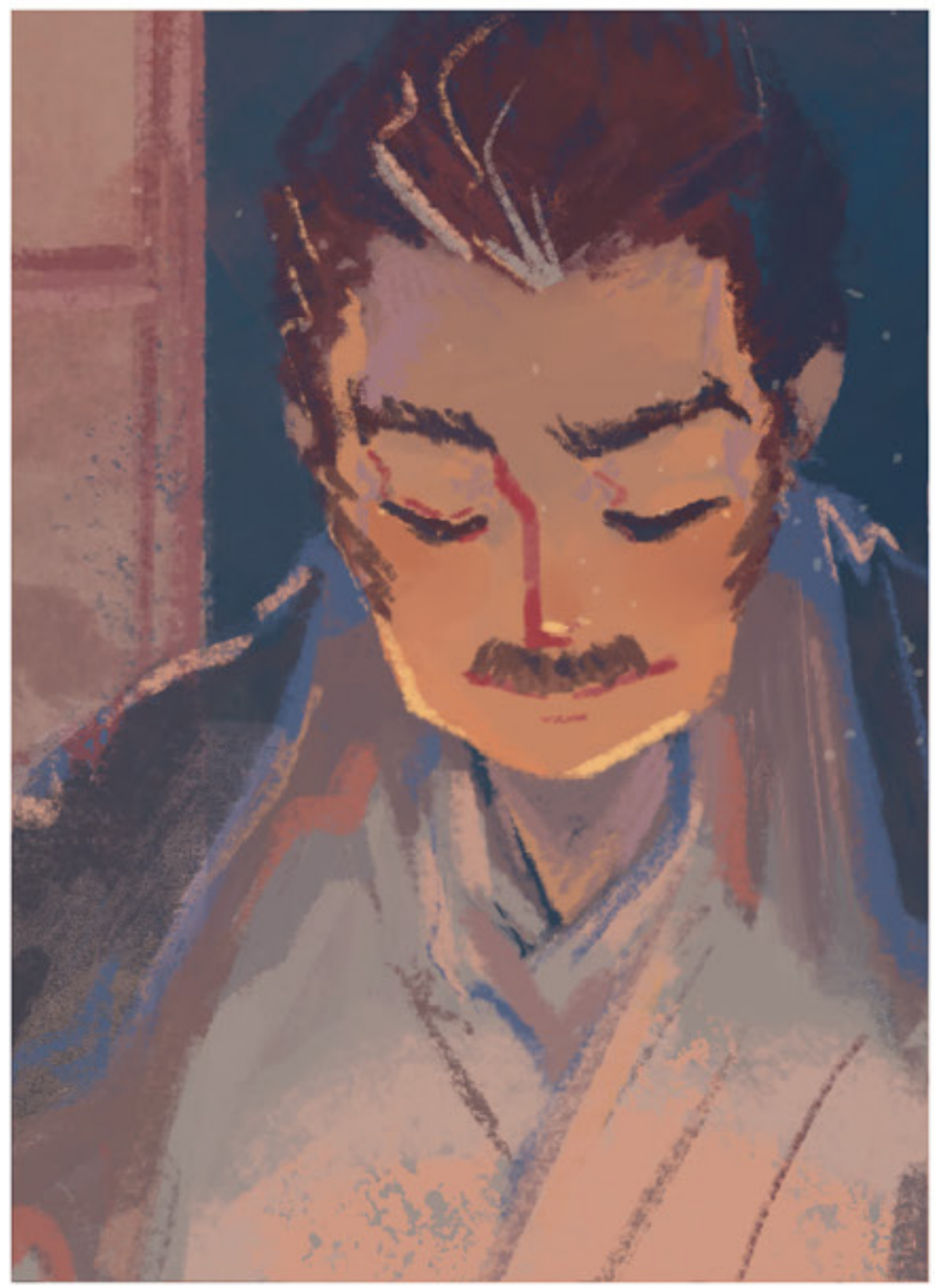


Cross
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Diana Bana
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rienndin
(@rienndin)



Holmes and Mikotoba's Letter Exchange

luster candy
✂ luster_candy



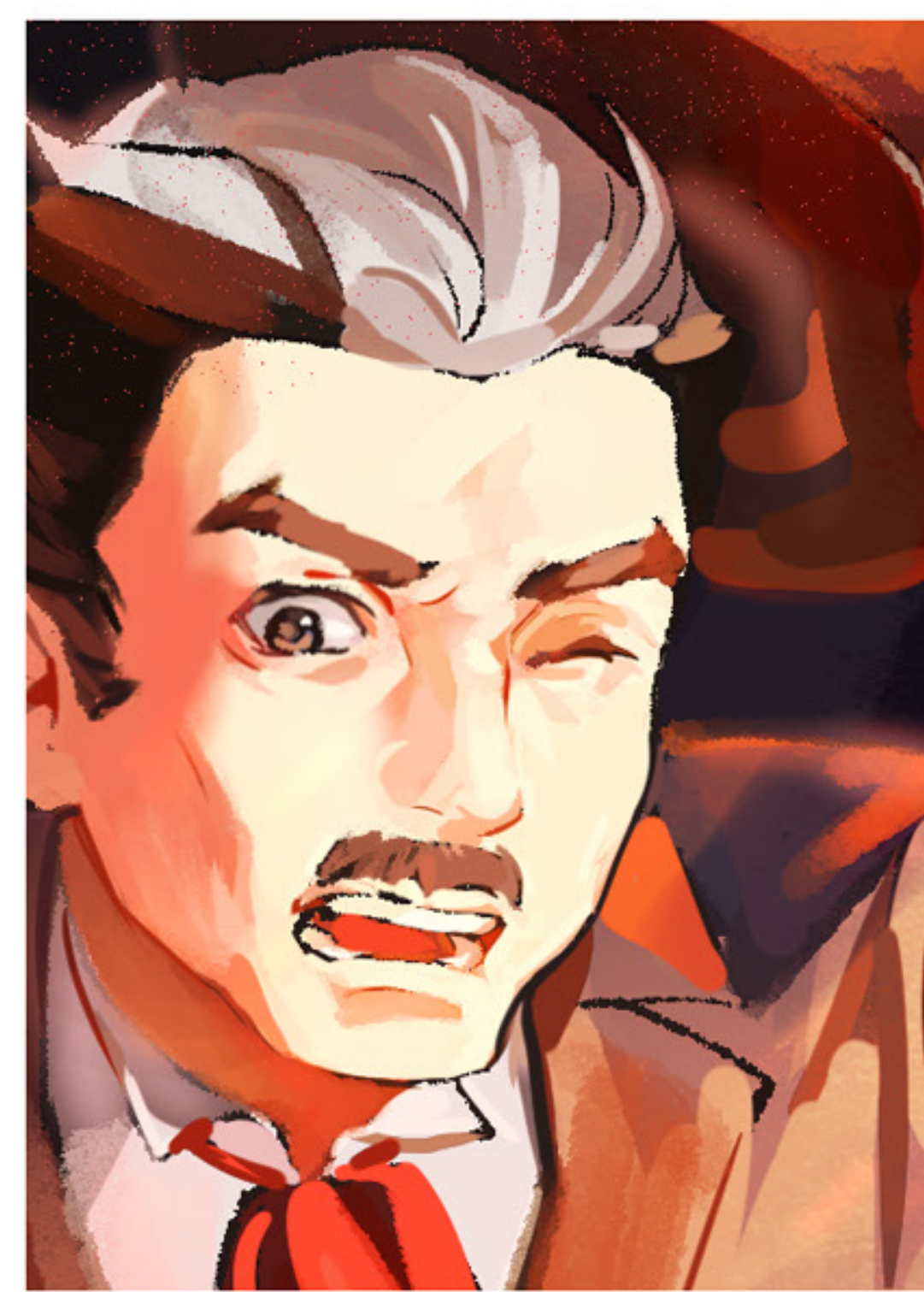
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Mikotoba's Journal Entry

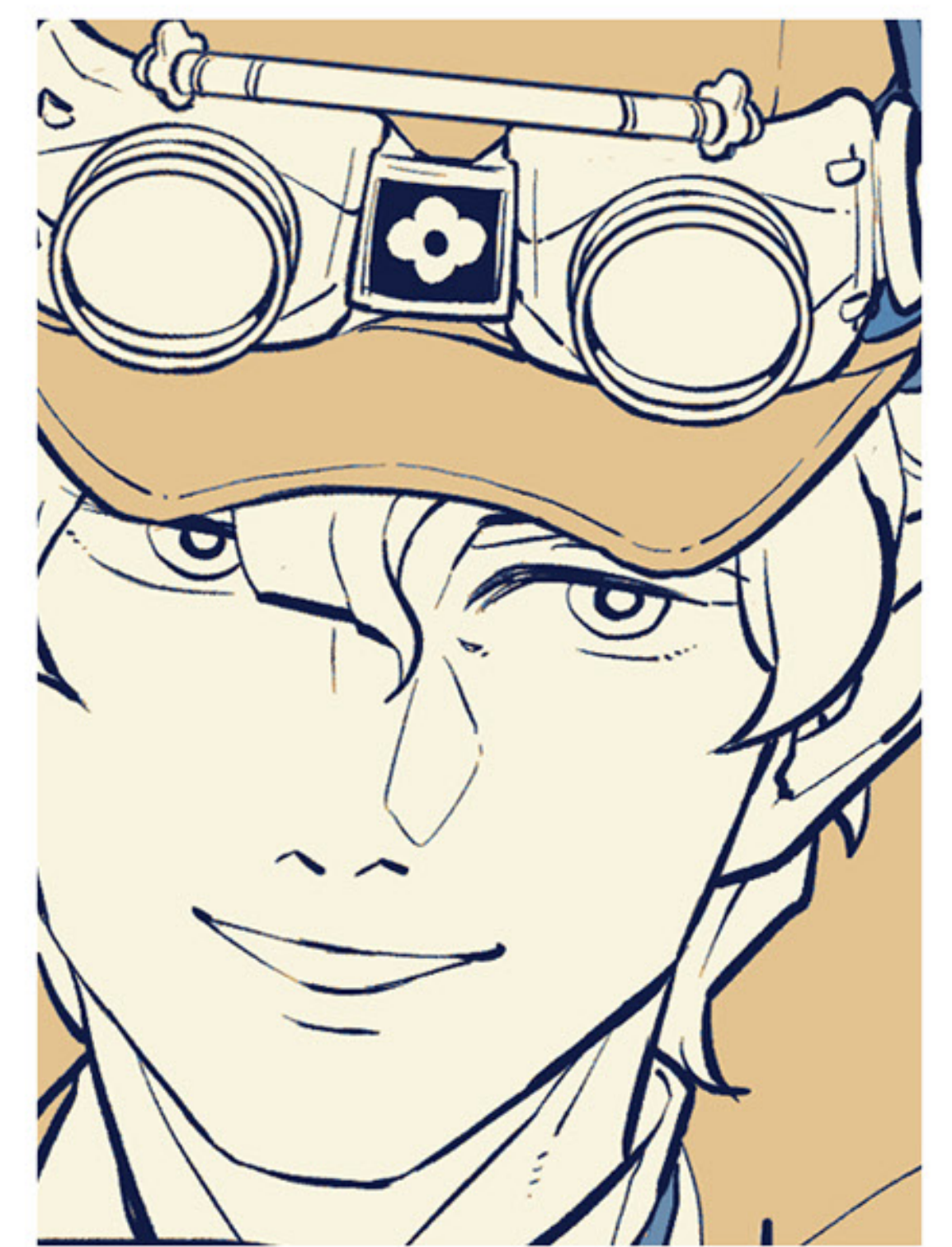


ellis

✂ hi_its_ellis
🐦 hi_its_ellis



Naa (@narr_dgs)



Shino
(@shino_dgs)



月月 (@tsuki_730)



Lou-Anne
(@liuannes)



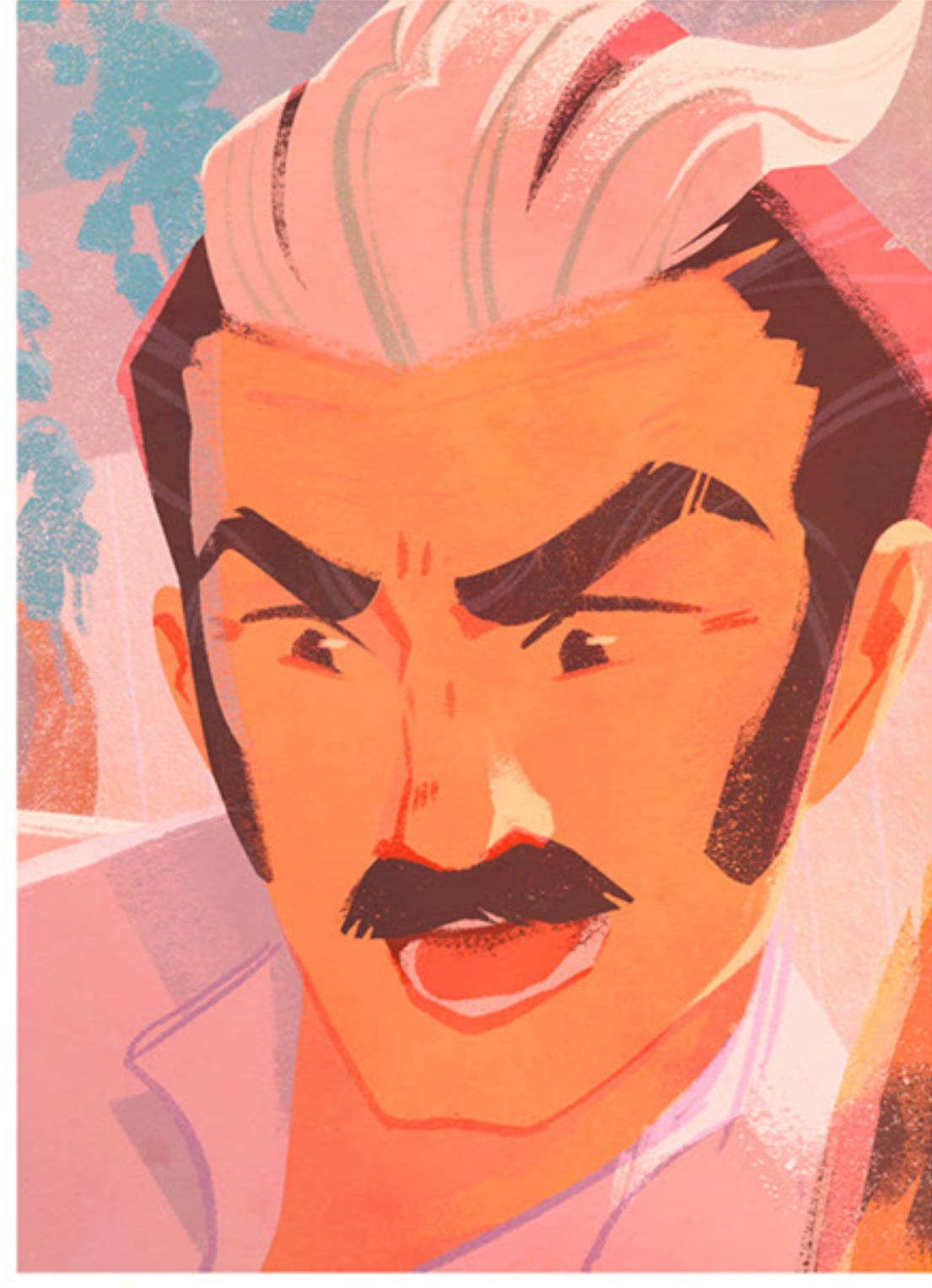
Holmes' Journal Entry

Andromeda

✂ exquisitefrogprince
🐦 exquisitefrog



Alpaca
(@AlpacaCarlesi)



Val (@maskenjager)



breloomings (@breloomings)

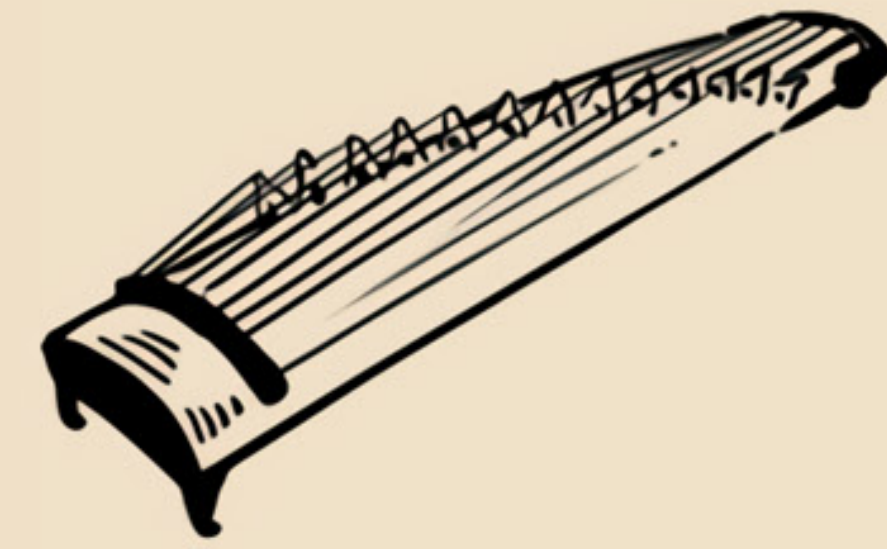
Finding Footing



daggar

🐦 knivesanddaggar
✂️ daggar

the sound of music



abrightgrayworld

🐦 aritalks1
✂️ abrightgrayworld



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amiepsychique
(@AmiePsychique)

Merch Artists



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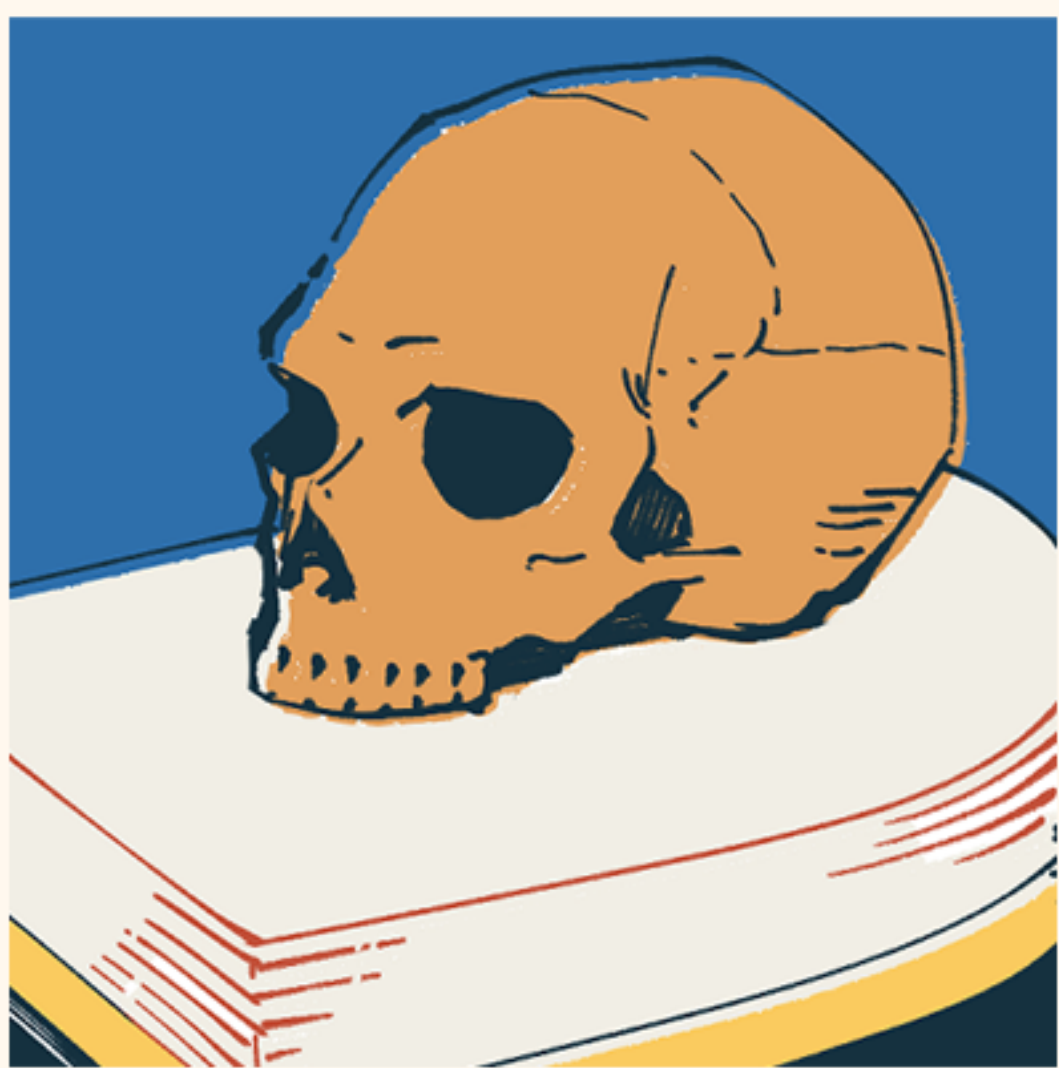




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Koba

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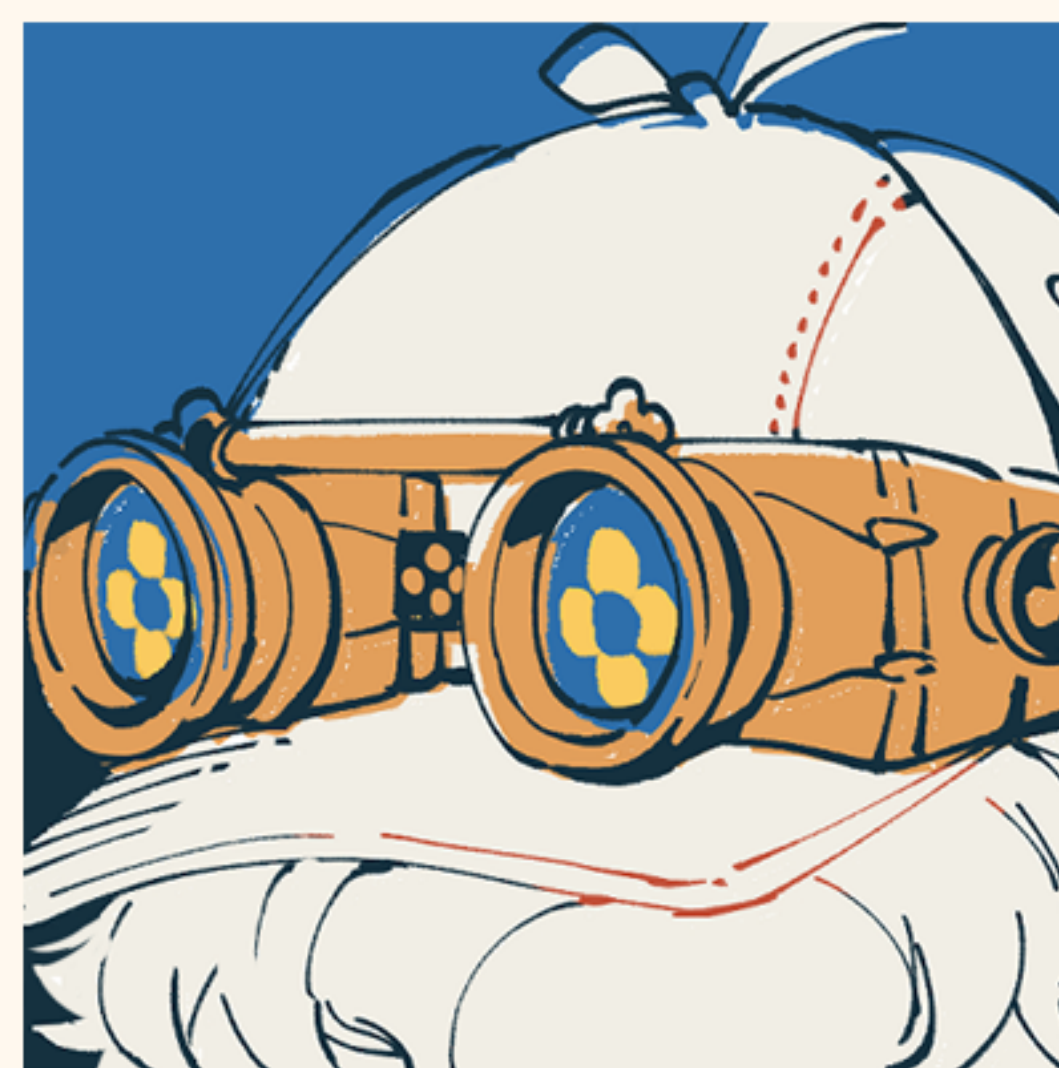
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Art Moderator



A Final Thanks



And with that, our journey has finally come to an end. We are eternally thankful for all of you who have followed us up to this point and supported us along the way, and for that, we would like to convey our deepest gratitude.

A big thank you to all the contributors and moderators who have poured all their love into this project. Despite having a small fanbase, your passion for this pair makes everything possible. We have been brought together and bonded by our shared fondness of Holmes and Mikotoba's relationship and we hope that we're able to make this experience fun and enjoyable for all of you!

Thank you very much for picking up a copy of this digital anthology, let us follow the years of Holmes' and Mikotoba's intimacy to the very end!



Project MKHMMK
2022